Women's Tragedies

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WOMEN'S TRAGEDIES

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WOMEN'S TRAGEDIES

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TO

JAMES NICOL DUNN

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THE TORQUE

I

No man could tell how long the family of Tregoning had lived at Carn Dhu. They had been notable people in the district from the very beginning of time, and the house they inhabited seemed to have a history co-extensive with theirs. But about the year 1660, the family having achieved a greater prominence than was ever theirs before, it was resolved to build a new and larger house of granite at a little distance from the old. The resolve was natural enough, seeing to what a position the yeoman, John Tregoning, had risen; yet there were many who found his intentions altogether laughable. For, though he had all else a strong man could desire, there had been no child born to him during the ten years of his married life.

He bore his trouble in proud silence; but the neighbour folk, who had known him all his days, and perceived how little the sad serious-

ness of his manhood accorded with his jovial youth, were far from under-estimating his sorrow. And they laughed among themselves, that a man should build himself a fine house for the mere pleasure of dwelling in it a little while, and presently going down to the grave and leaving it for the inhabitation of others than the children of his loins. Doubtless Jonathan and his wife Hannah had perceived what was the inevitable comment upon their action; indeed, it may be their enterprise was in its first intention a defiance of the fate that kept from them their natural birthright of a life on earth beyond the grave. But one day, when the new house neared completion, Jonathan came striding over the moorland with a song upon his lips, and on his face a pride and gladness no man had seen there since the days when he and Hannah had but newly joined hands before the altar, vowing to make the pilgrimage of life in company. He had a score of new orders to give to the men engaged upon his house; his interest in the work had increased a hundred-fold in this one night. And the workmen wondered.

'Why, 'tis a fine house we 're building for 'ee,

Jonathan Tregoning; an' there 's few things a man could want that you do lack. An' yet 'tis strange to hear 'ee singing foolish songs like that, an' with that look upon your face. Now, where and how didst chance upon the gift of happiness? 'Tis a new thing in thee, with all thy wonderful good fortune.'

It was an aged workman who spoke. Jonathan looked gravely into his eyes for a moment. Then he laughed in the gladness of his heart.

'Why, Anthony, where didst thee come upon the gift o' wisdom? 'Tis a new thing, indeed! As for me—wouldst have me live the old life here in the new house you are building me? God, if you only knew how true you speak! A new life, Anthony! . . . "A little child shall lead them."'

Immediately he moved away to a small eminence whence he could better survey the house, leaving the old man to gaze after him with wonder and disbelief mingling on his wrinkled face.

The yeoman himself marvelled now (as all the neighbour-folk had wondered) that he had ever had the heart to order the building of the house: he could scarcely imagine that the man

he had been until the previous day could have been capable of any ambition for the future, of any activity save such as might be necessary for the comfort of life from day to day. Now his whole energy was given to the scheme, and his brain was busy elaborating it. And so he did not observe the approach of a woman who now appeared at a distance of a hundred yards from his position on the moorland; nor did his eyes wander from the building when she had drawn near to him.

She was a woman of five-and-thirty, dark, tall, and of a very rebellious mien; her features had doubtless been beautiful, but now they were become the outward mirror of her soul, and her soul had been many years in torment, by reason of love given foolishly. Tregoning did not move; the woman paused and watched him, and presently a wave of angry feeling darkened her face. She spoke.

'A fine house, Jonathan! A fine new house for thee and thy poor Hannah!'

Tregoning started from his dreams. 'Ay,' he said, ''tis better than the old. Yet we have had much of happiness there also.'

Again the worn face darkened. 'You have

had happiness?' she cried. 'Nay, you may lie as you will to others, but not with me. Why, I have learned in these past years, watching you, that the Lord is even just! You were promised to me: for the promise is one not made with words. And with me you should have had happiness, and when you came to die there would have been children to keep your name alive and finish the work you left undone. What has it profited you that you went from me and drove home that barren thing out of the West-country?'

There was anger in Tregoning's voice, but hardly less of pity for a woman whom he accounted mad. 'There was no promise,' he said, 'nor ever thought of a promise. God makes the maid for the man, and you had still been no wife for me, though I had never set eyes on Hannah. There were a score you might have had, but never me.'

The woman's hate broke out again. 'You may deny the promise; but once you were glad to make it, and for ten years you have borne the liar's punishment. A fine house, indeed! But the fool builds houses for the children of other men.'

Jonathan forgot his pity. 'Talk as you please,' he said; 'but better talk as you do know. I have loved Hannah in sorrow and in pleasure. Now I thank God the child which is to be born is hers, not thine. Let thy tongue run; for who shall heed it, childless woman?'

He left her abruptly and returned to the old workman.

'Bid your men carry the work to its end as quickly as may be. There shall be feasting, I promise you, when the house is completed.'

And he strode off across the moorland to the old house, where Hannah waited for his coming with something of the shy gladness she had known in early days when he came courting her.

II

Very quickly the news passed throughout the country-side that Hannah was about to become a mother. The very people who had cried out at the folly of her husband's enterprise, now saw in it only a marvellous faith which Providence had made haste to recognise and reward. Jonathan and his wife moved

very quietly into the new house, and there the child was born a month or two later.

Hannah had never doubted that Heaven's generosity would be complete and absolute, and the event justified her faith. They two, for ten years childless and without a hope of children, were parents of as fine a boy as ever lived in the dreams of a woman. They forgot their dreary past; they were young again, and like people newly married, as they listened to the weak voice of the child. Jonathan sat many a long hour at Hannah's bedside, and day by day it was made clear to him that he had not known his wife until now. The truth is, Hannah the mother was another woman than Hannah the childless wife. A new joy was given her, an old grief taken away; life had renewed its possibilities. Very soon she began to talk of the festivities that should celebrate at once the completion of the new house, the birth of the child, and the beginning of their new happy life in his young life.

It was well they had room for guests without number, for all the country-side was rejoicing with them. Jonathan could hardly go unhindered about the common necessary business

of the day, so eager were the neighbouring folk to have him stop and take their congratulations, drink the health of child and mother, and render a minute account of the progress they made. And long before he had ceased to stand vigilantly on guard at Hannah's door, the women came and were fain to speak with her, if it were but for a moment, and to see the brave boy lying, not on the broidered nursing-cushion, but in his proper place at her breast.

'A man would 'most think,' said Jonathan one day, 'that our good fortune was good luck to all the world. For all the world is glad of it.'

This sympathy of their friends was no unimportant constituent of their great happiness; and even Jonathan forgot to wonder what were the present emotions of Janet Chegwidden, the woman with whom he had spoken upon the moor, on the day when he first heard that a child was coming. Yet she was still living in the background of their lives.

Hannah soon rose from her bed and resumed her household duties. Half a dozen women of approved skill in the art of cookery were called to her assistance, and while they filled cup-

boards and pantries with a tremendous plenitude of food, Jonathan went far and wide inviting guests to the feast.

At last the day of the festivities arrived. Everything was made ready in good time; it remained only to see that the boy was fitly decorated and attired. He was a well-grown, happy child, and the task of dressing him was an undiluted pleasure to the mother. When the work was completed she laid him carefully in the cradle and called the father.

Jonathan gazed fondly upon his first-born. 'There 'll be never a woman among them—maid or mother—that won't be envying you,' he said. Then, after a pause: 'Dost mind that moon-shaped necklet that was dug up while the house was building? 'Twould look fine about his neck.'

Hannah recoiled from the suggestion. ''Tis hard and heavy,' she said. 'It isn't in the power of gold to make the boy look prettier, an' I wouldn't have him cry for the world. Let well alone.'

But Jonathan was gone without hearing, and a moment later he returned bearing the torque—an elongated crescent of pale gold which had

lain many centuries in the grave of some savage chief when it was dug up in the building of the house. 'There,' he said, 'put that on him. 'Twill look beautiful upon the white of his dress. But the hair of him is brighter.'

Hannah faced him, the torque held slackly and unwillingly in her hand. 'He's well enough as he is,' she said; 'don't make me do it. And . . . who can tell who wore it years ago, and what the wearing of it now will mean? Was there ever a handsome baby but the pixies were dying to have it? I am afraid of the pixies; I am afraid to put this thing about his neck. Who can say what spells they have laid upon it?'

Jonathan laughed with a man's scorn of woman's fears, a man's unwillingness to admit his own superstitions; then, as the child caught sight of the gleaming gold and crowed, stretching out weak hands towards it. 'There,' he said, 'the boy is asking for it. 'Tis foolishness, that talk of the pixies. Put the thing about his neck.'

And when she saw the child still stretching forth his hands towards the golden toy, Hannah bowed herself to her husband's will, thrusting

her private fears aside. The boy crowed delightedly as his fingers closed about the circlet; and very soon Hannah was called away to receive and welcome the first arrivals of her guests. All through the earlier hours of the evening the boy held an audience, for there was none but must see and handle him, marvel at his wonderful growth and his good temper, and weigh most carefully the question whether he most resembled father or mother. There were some who remarked upon his wearing of the torque, and to these Hannah nervously explained her husband's fancy. But when one of them talked foolishly of 'ill-luck,' and the power of the pixies, Jonathan overheard, and had he not been playing the part of host would have been angry. 'An old woman's widdle!' he cried impatiently. 'Fit to frighten old women.'

Presently the guests were called to supper. There was some little confusion while they chose their seats, for a multitude of viands called for skilful carvers; then followed a noisy interval until all were served. But at last all crying needs had been supplied, and only the most inveterate of jesters found time for aught

but eating. The child had been left in charge of a young girl, and, under pretence of needing to supervise her domestics, Hannah visited him once or twice. She knew that he must presently be exhibited to the guests once more; when that was over she was resolved to take the golden circlet from his neck, that he might sleep in safety.

At last a man rose from his seat and called for silence; very briefly he reminded his fellows of the many good gifts on whose possession they had to congratulate their host. 'Fill your cups,' he said finally, 'and drink good luck to the new house, and good health to the new baby.' There was a roar of applause, and the company stood. Then a voice was heard above the rest: 'The baby! Bring in the boy!'

Hannah turned to give a servant the order to bring in the child, but her motherly pride prevented her. She slipped from the table and went herself to fetch her son. As she passed down the slate-paved passage she heard the voice of the nursemaid coming from another part of the house, and resolved to deal hardly with her for this neglect of duty. Then she

entered the room where she had left the child, and hastened to the side of the cradle. . . .

Guests and servants throughout the house were startled by a sudden awful cry of desolation; and as Jonathan came from the feasting-room, followed by frightened friends, he was confronted by his wife. Her face was tortured with a very madness of sorrow and fear. 'The child is gone,' she cried. 'The golden collar. . . . Did I not say we should lose him?'

All night, and for many days that followed, Jonathan wandered throughout the country-side asking high and low for news of 'a little boy-child with a moon-shaped collar of gold about his neck.' But there was no trace of him discoverable. Hannah from the first refused to entertain a hope, and very soon her husband also desisted from his vain search. And so their house was left unto them desolate.

III

There was no lack of kindly sympathy with Tregoning and his wife in this their time of tribulation; but the hurt they had suffered was of the sort that sympathy does but aggravate. 'The Lord gave?' cried Hannah passionately,

breaking upon the decent commonplaces of one who sought to comfort. 'The Lord gave? Did He only give that He might take away? . . . Did 'ee ever wonder what thoughts He must have o' nights?' She alone knew, and that only by a slow daily revelation, how great was the disaster which had befallen her and Jonathan.

Once before they two had been cut off from the world by a great sorrow long endured; but in those days the very fact of their affliction had been in some poor sense a bond between them. Hannah, at least, had perceived during the brief weeks of exquisite happiness while the child was with them, that they were the better companions in good fortune because of the dismal years that lay behind.

But now that darkness had fallen again the old relations were not resumed. It seemed, when the trouble was new, as if each suffered so poignant an agony that the old sympathy was a thing impossible. They lived together in the great house upon the moorland; yet each was verily alone, even as a man is alone in the midst of his dearest when death comes near and he lies in the last stupor. It was thus at first; and there was little change in Hannah to the

end: for she knew well that she would have no other child.

But because the husband was a man, and bound to take an active part in life—because, also, he was of a stronger character than she—his nature, warped and strained by tribulation, seemed gradually to undergo a more disastrous change. The earlier years of disappointment had made him no great lover of the companionship of his fellows, since the most of them possessed as a most natural right the boon himself desired so passionately and so vainly; now he became morose and cynical, almost a hater of his kind. Yet he was soon more hopelessly a drunkard than many a man who reaps damnation as the harvest of good seed too generously implanted in him at birth. At one inn or another in half a score of lonely villages he became a familiar figure; every night he drank heavily, but the dull pain he suffered kept him always in some sort the master of his senses. It is possible the influence of his presence tended to sobriety in others, for folly stands naked and ashamed if she has not the allegiance of all men. Tregoning would sit perfectly sober in a corner of the room; for the most part he

watched the rest silently and refused to be drawn into the conversation. If he did speak, it was only to hurl brutal unnecessary scorn at the head of some harmless good-for-naught who had ventured to address him with the bluff good-fellowship bred in country taverns.

Gradually, choosing thus to live alone in the midst of his fellows, he began to impress the witnesses of his life with a certain sense of supernatural isolation. Only a vague hint of the idea crept now and again into the talk of the village folk; but it was felt by all that for some unknown reason Tregoning had incurred the terrible anger of Heaven. The children feared him; good matrons had for him an unreasoning instinctive antipathy which almost amounted to hatred. And there were events in his life which impressed both him and Hannah with something of the same ill-defined sense of living under the perpetual disfavour of God. In the first years of their married life he had prospered exceedingly in all he undertook; but for the denial of children he might have deemed himself transcendently fortunate.

It would have been hard in these latter days to lay the finger upon the faults in him which

were the cause of his daily mischances. But though the drink never mastered him in the common sense, it often seemed to inspire him with a maniacal perverseness. And thus it was always his cattle that died, his crops that were left unharvested until the fine weather had broken up and the rain ruined them.

There was an end to their barren prosperity at Carn Dhu; and Hannah, living year after year in the darkened house, suffered dumbly, as it is decreed that only women shall suffer; it was continually a cause of wonder to her that she had been born out of the unsentient clay. Tregoning did not maltreat her; often there were whole weeks when he seemed hardly to be conscious of her existence; but at times he did not scruple to use against her the spiteful weapon of the tongue, cursing her impotence as the root of all they suffered.

As for the woman Janet Chegwidden, she also had felt the heavy hand of time. Her strength of body and of mind failed rapidly, and because she had lived alone and appeared to have no natural love for any living creature, the foolish people of the neighbourhood gave

her an evil name, and took every occasion to torment and harass her.

But one day a woman, kinder than the rest, passed by her cottage and heard no sound of movement through the open door. She paused and called upon Janet by name; then, getting no answer, she entered the house.

Janet lay in a huddled heap upon the floor, her face swollen and disfigured, her thin lips blue and fringed with froth. The woman knelt and made certain that life was not yet gone from her; and presently, having done so much as she was able, she hurried into the village in quest of assistance.

And Janet Chegwidden did not die; but from that day hand and foot and tongue of her were paralysed and dead. Only in her fixed and staring eyes did the life remain.

Now that she was thus pitifully reduced, the women of the place entreated her not less kindly than if she had been the universal benefactress in her days of strength. One or another would come of a morning to see that she lay in decent comfort; others would visit her at other periods of the day. And Janet, lying with unmoved contemptuous face, would

look upon them hauntingly with unblenching eyes. Now and again, lest the dead creature should grow weary of confinement to the bed, they moved her to a great oaken chair, so fastening her with the aid of a broad belt that she could safely be left alone. And there was never a woman but was glad to have the duty over and done with as she looked back from the doorway and beheld this wooden thing—this corpse with the living eyes—seated rigid in an attitude of grim discomfort.

Hannah had not lived so long a time in the home of her adoption without learning something of Janet's delusion. But it is certain that what she had heard or discovered had not impressed her deeply; moreover, they were both old women now, and as she looked back upon the years of her married life, and considered her present fortunes, it seemed to her that her enemy had slight enough excuse for hatred or for envy. So she gave freely to Janet's sustenance; and one day when the work of the household had been finished earlier than usual, she set forth from her house on the moor to visit the cottage.

Reaching the doorway, she paused a while;

for now that she had come so far she began vaguely to repent of her own daring. But it was only for a moment she hesitated ; then she raised the latch and entered. There was no movement of the clumsy rigid figure ; the living eyes stared unmovingly from the grey fixed face. Hannah spoke a few words of kindly greeting, solely for her own relief: for the dreadful stillness oppressed her with a growing fear. Then she placed her basket upon the well-scoured table and began to remove from it certain gifts of food which she had brought.

A curious nervousness came over her; for the dead figure did not stir, and the eyes watched her with a fierce intensity of brooding malice. It was as though some awful Presence stood at her side, invisible to her, but seen and closely watched in all its movements by this creature who had come so near to death as to be no longer on the side of the living. A lock of yellow-grey hair had become loosened and fallen over the woman's forehead, giving a fearful grotesqueness to her appearance. Hannah was possessed with an absurdly urgent desire to smooth it back into its proper

place; but a continually resurgent fear of the living eyes restrained her.

'Here is food,' she said, longing to be relieved from the dead weight of silence. 'Could 'ee eat something?'

There was no answer, no movement, and the sense of nervous confusion strengthened its hold upon her. She broke some bread into a bowl and poured milk upon it; then she looked about her for a spoon wherewith to feed the afflicted woman. The furniture of the cottage was sufficiently scanty; yet she could nowhere discover what she required. And presently it appeared to her that the living eyes of that dead figure had wandered to a shelf fixed high up against the wall.

'Is there a spoon on the shelf?' she asked; and the eyes watched her maliciously as she thrust a stool towards the shelf and stood upon it to investigate. There was no spoon to be found: nothing, indeed, but a dusty metallic object whose nature Hannah did not immediately recognise. She took it from the shelf, mechanically wiping it as she stepped from the stool. The eyes of the paralysed woman still watched her, and a curious dull

thrill (as of a taut wet string struck sharply) passed over the rigid figure. And Hannah cried aloud, and turning, faced her enemy, demanding words from the very dead.

For it was a crescent of thin gold she held within her hand—the golden torque which the boy had worn upon the day of his disappearance. She had learned in a moment the secret of his death.

A fearful change was visible in Janet Chegwidden. The fixed eyes blazed: it was as though they would take through her unconquerable will that power of significant speech which had long left her tongue. Then the frozen features worked and were convulsed, as a man's throat works when, striving to speak, he finds the words choke him because of some great fear. In a moment the struggle was over: once again her face was that of the living woman, Janet Chegwidden. Hannah had indeed called her back to life, but—like the woman of Endor—was overmastered by a shuddering fear that kept her dumb. Then the lips parted, and a laugh sounded through the room, expressing better than any words the abominable triumph of Hannah's malignant

enemy. It was as though she had come back from the grave to laugh at the uncovering of her wickedness.

A moment later the figure stiffened again, and the eyes grew fixed and awful. Then there was a sudden relaxation: Janet Chegwidden swung forward in her chair, and, but for the belt supporting her, would have fallen prone upon the floor.

THE GREAT KO-KO

THE end was very near. Joanna had been weakly all her life, and before her death there were five years during which she was bedridden. I had thought when I saw her at night that she would assuredly be gone before the morning, but now at midday she was still alive, still conscious. The woman who was with her watched me as I approached the bedside; in a moment she had comprehended my judgment upon the case. She crossed the room and opened the window very quietly, that the soul of Joanna might escape without trouble when presently it should be released from its prison of the flesh. The sick woman had not been sleeping, though her eyes were closed. The little movement aroused her; she turned in the bed and looked into my face.

I pulled a chair from its corner and sat down. 'Well, Joanna,' I said, 'how is it to-day?'

'Why, doctor,' she answered quietly, 'how can 'ee pretend you don't know how 'tis without tellin'? 'Tis a few more hours for me, or perhaps a few more minutes, and then Home. . . . The Lord hath dealt bountifully with His handmaiden; but I could wish Thomas-James was here. A good son! 'Twould be a comfort to have him here at the last, after twelve years without once seeing him.'

Joanna had been many years a widow and childless. At the age of forty she had married a miner who had already a family of six; and in due season she had borne a son, Thomas-James. When she became a widow for the second time, the children of her husband had been very generous, so that from the first she was saved the awful fear of poverty, and knew that she might look to die in the little cottage in Tallywarn Street, where her husband had left her. But though they dealt with her very kindly, discharging more than the full duty of children, her heart was bound up in the boy, Thomas-James.

Joanna was too old for perfect wisdom.

The boy had in him the possibilities of many admirable virtues, for whose sake he became

the favourite of all men. But because the widow was weakly fond of him, and at the same time apt to be unduly alarmed at escapades which were but boyishness in action, the ultimate development of these good qualities was into vices, or, at the least, to weaknesses. The boy had a pretty humour and a beautiful soprano voice. All Tallywarn talked at divers times of the intrigues of rival choirmasters anxious to secure his services; and when the Tallywarn Ethiopian Minstrels made their first appearance, Thomas-James won all hearts by his rendering of certain sentimental plantation songs.

He did no particular harm, but he was very much before the public, and thus all his deeds were assured of notoriety.

Moreover, Joanna was already past the age when a woman should be asked to discipline the young, and found his smallest indiscretion ineffably shocking. In the end the boy came to think of himself as a very desperate character indeed, and at the age of eighteen—merely, I conceive, through the influence of this delusion, and because it seemed the proper thing for such a youth as himself to do—he ran away from home.

Twelve years had passed from the time of his disappearance when I entered Joanna's bedroom that bleak February morning; and though he had sometimes written and very often sent her money, he had never once visited her. And now as she lay dying her thoughts were of him.

She lay with her eyes closed and murmured inaudibly; only, once or twice I caught the name of her son. And, because I knew the end must be soon, I waited.

There seemed to be more noise than usual in Tallywarn Street, though it is always a busy place until doors are closed and lights grow fewer at half-past nine. I went to the open window. The pavements on both sides were filled with men, women, and children, all of whom were looking very intently down the long street in the direction of the town. At a window opposite appeared the ruffled head of a young miner, who had probably spent the past night underground, and awakened from his sleep only when it was told him that to delay would mean losing the spectacle to which all the town had been looking forward.

For at last a murmur ran along the street; people ceased to talk, and stared west towards

the square. There was heard suddenly the bray of a brass band, and a woman ran from her place upon the causeway to her cottage door. 'Susan-Jane!' she cried excitedly, 'Susan-Jane! The riders is comin'.' And immediately another woman appeared from within, proceeding to wipe the soapsuds from arms bare to the elbow, as she took up her stand with the rest.

Joanna was too far gone to be much disturbed by the noise. The band came slowly nearer, and as it approached and passed beneath the window there was a great hubbub of voices. But the widow lay very quiet. 'Twelve years,' she murmured presently, 'twelve years since he went away; and he was nearly a grown man then. I could die easier if he was here.'

She opened her eyes, and the woman who had been attending her (one of the step-daughters) moved nearer. Even now a hot flush came to the old face, as Joanna realised that her words might have given pain.

'You was all of 'ee good to me; sometimes, before Thomas-James went away, I used to fancy I couldn' have been dearer to you, nor you to me, if you had been born children to me.

But you're a mother now: you do know that a mother must think of her own. Every day since he went I've been longin' to see the boy again; I shall still be longin' for him when I'm with the Lord.'

The band had reached the Bryanite chapel by this time, and, turning, had gone back by another way towards the town. The noise was somewhat less, but the riders themselves were passing in straggling procession up the street, and as they went by, the people on the pavement made remarks on their bearing and appearance, being vastly critical of such outdoor demonstrations, though too poor to be well acquainted with the inside of the circus-tent. Presently there was a great noise of laughter and cheering from the remoter end of the street. I remembered that 'the Great Ko-Ko,' a clown, was to walk on his high stilts in the procession, and immediately guessed that he was coming; for in Tallywarn a circus stands or falls by the merits of its 'merrymen.' Presently, the window being open, one could catch some of the rude jests the great man was exchanging with those who watched him from cottage windows.

The younger woman was manifestly perturbed and angered at this intrusion of worldliness upon a death-scene; but Joanna's peace was undisturbed.

'Longin' for en even in heaven!' she murmured. 'And never satisfied until I do find his voice amid the singin'. He had such a lovely voice: do 'ee mind how he used to sing, "Shall we gather at the river?" standin' all by himself in the front of the choir-gallery up to Bryanites', and the very preacher turnin' round in the pulpit to listen, 'stead o' thinkin' 'pon what he should say when it came to sermon-time? 'Twould be sweet to go Home with the voice of en still in my ears.'

I had thought the younger woman a little unsympathetic, but her next act was very tenderly inspired. She began to sing the old hymn softly, and because her heart was very full of love and pity there was something in her voice which might, indeed, have made death easier to Joanna. She sang one verse.

Then the noise became louder than it had been at all. She looked confusedly towards the open window, and forgot to go on with her singing, for the clown, solemnly stalking on his

stilts, was very near, and it was possible to hear every word he said.

I rose from my chair, and was upon the point of stepping to the window to close it, when a sudden movement called my attention to Joanna.

She had started up in the bed, and was leaning forward, eagerly attentive, every feature radiant with an exquisite and growing happiness. 'Thomas-James!' she cried, 'my son, my dear boy! Come, are 'ee? Aw, my dear, my heart was sick wi' longin' for 'ee.'

The radiant happiness faded, as she paused, to a peace that was yet more beautiful. Death had come very gently, and the frail figure fell back lightly upon the pillows.

The step-daughter had sprung forward, but seeing the quietness of the old face she stood silent and still. At last she looked across at me.

'You may pull down the blind,' I said softly.

The noise had now become intolerable. The woman had but half drawn the white blind when she started back with a cry of indignant horror. For a hideous grinning face appeared outside the window, and the people roared (few

of them knowing anything of Joanna) when the Great Ko-ko spoke.

'Why so shy, pretty maid?' he said. 'There 's no need——'

The knowledge must have come upon him suddenly, with the sight of his half-sister's face. The voice ceased ; there was a woman's scream and the sound of a heavy fall. Then, after an interval of silence, I heard a door opened below, and a man stumbled up the stairs and entered the room. His face was plastered with flour and uncouthly daubed with vermilion. The blood streamed from a great cut upon his forehead.

For one moment he looked at the still figure which lay upon the bed. Then he fell forward upon his knees, crying and sobbing as he might have done had he been still the young lad for whom Joanna had longed while she lay dying.

THE MAN IN THE ROOM

SHE seemed a child when we were married, and I was resolved she shouldn't learn the bitter meaning of poverty. There were but three weeks of the new life, then parting, and three years of loneliness out in Dakota. The child was born ; a year more passed, and it was dead ; and very soon Nellie began to write begging me to come home to her. But I was a fool, and didn't look beyond the words ; it was only when her father wrote, saying how she grieved for the child, that I gave up trying to save for the future, and went back home to Trenoweth.

Nellie was the same as ever: young and pretty, and still so slight and slender that a man could hardly think her a woman, made to bear a woman's burdens. She didn't speak once of the child that was dead, and I let her have her way, though I was longing to hear more of it. Sometimes when I sat with her in

the bit of garden-ground, or walked in the lanes that lead down to the sea, I could have fancied we two were children again, alone in a new-made world, and knowing nothing of any evil thing.

And so it went until a day in August, when I was working night-chore, and left home a trifle after nine for the mine. 'Twas some small thing had gone wrong with the engines: when I came there I found we couldn't go underground that night; so I turned and went homeward again, glad as a bird to get back to Nellie. I was always loth to be away from her now that I saw her every day.

I walked back whistling through the narrow lanes, saying a 'Good-night' once or twice to people meeting me, and glad to take note of a score of common things that would have been nothing to me if I had not been abroad so long. There was no moon, and the sky was all done over with a thin mist from the sea; yet there was a sort of glimmering in the air, and a wetness that gathered in great drops on a man's moustache and eyebrows.

And so at last I came in sight of the cottage.

It stood alone, upon the right-hand side of the road, at the bottom of a little slope. Just beyond it the road went into parts, in the shape of a narrow Y. And as I got to the gate I heard a man coming quickly to meet me down the road on the left—out of Trenoweth. I waited, standing in the shadow of a great fuchsia-bush that overhung the wall of the garden, and the man came quite close to me, seeming to walk straight towards the gate, before he saw me. Then he stopped suddenly, and I knew who he was; 'twas Neily Matthews, a cousin of Nellie. There had been a time when I thought he might marry her, but Nellie laughed when I told her of it, 'to think I could fancy she would take up with a boy like that!'

He stopped suddenly, like a man startled, and I came forth from under the fuchsia.

'Hullo, Neily!' I said. 'Where be goin' this way, an' this time o' night, and in such a tearin' hurry?'

He didn't speak for a moment, and when he found words I thought his voice was strange.

'To tell the truth,' he said, 'I can't say where I was goin'. I don't know myself. I was just out for a stroll.'

I couldn't keep from laughin', to hear him talk like that to a man three years married.

'And alone?' I said. 'Young men must be finely changed since my time!'

'Well,' he said, and the lie came easier now, 'how should one like me keep a secret from a man so wise? To tell the truth, I had a tiff with a girl last night: Jim Roskerby's daughter, that lives up by the mine. All the evening I've been hoping she would come down to Trenoweth, and as she hasn' come I am goin' up to try to get a look at her.'

'Art mazed?' I said. 'I've been young myself, and a fool, but 'tis ten o'clock. The maid's in bed and sleepin', this long time. Leave her till to-morrow, and since you 're here come in and have a bit of supper. There's a light, see: Nellie haven' gone to bed yet.'

I couldn't for the life of me understand him. He didn't speak for a minute; then he began to stammer out excuses, shuffling his feet in the dust; and before I could hear what he had to say the door of the house was thrown open, and I could see Nellie standing there against the light. And then Neily was silent in a moment.

Nellie peered into the dark across the little garden.

'Who's there?' she called, and I could tell by her voice she was frightened to hear voices at this time o' night.

'All right, Nellie,' I cried. ''Tis only me: me an' Neily. I've been askin' him to come in and have a bit of supper, but I can't get him to say yes. I suppose you can give us a bit o' something? He've got love-troubles, so he tells me; you may depend he won't eat much.'

There was a long silence, and I hardly knew her voice when she spoke.

'There's not much,' she said. 'But he's welcome to what there is. Bring him in.'

But Neily wouldn't hear of it; he turned away and went back towards Trenoweth, and I walked up the garden path to where Nellie was waiting at the door. I took her face between my hands to kiss it, and as I touched her a sudden fear took me. I forgot to kiss her, and stepped past into the house without speaking.

And in a moment I knew everything, and all the good in life was dead for me. For the

cloth was spread, the lamp well trimmed; and on the table plates were laid for two.

I stood there like a man turned to stone. Nellie followed me into the room, and for a second she stood dumb and white as death. I could feel the struggle she was making, as plain as if her heart had been laid bare.

But she was brave, and mastered herself.

'Ah!' she said, with a soft laugh. 'Canst guess the meanin' of the two plates, and the two chairs drawn to the table? I used to have things to do by daytime when you were away, and so I made shift to forget some part o' my loneliness. But when night came I was forced to sit idle, and I was all the time longin' to have you back. And so supper was always laid for two, and the easiest chair was set before the plate that was not used. I used to linger over supper, thinkin' "If the door should open, and he come in!" 'Twas foolishness, an' yet I couldn' but do it.'

Then she stopped, to see how the lie took me, and I knew that the thing she told was just like what she might have done in truth when I first went away. But I didn't speak, and she began again.

'And now you have come at last, just as I used to fancy! Come and sit down!'

She drew out the easy-chair that was put ready: I sat down, and she made me eat the supper she had prepared for her lover. When a man is wounded unto death 'tis one flash o' ghastly pain, and then the very agony do stun him, and perhaps 'tis a long time before he feels his hurt. 'Twas that way with me.

I sat there dull and stupid, while she talked an' laughed: it was like the old days, when I used to take tea in her father's house and wonder whether I was as old as I seemed to be when I looked at her. For she laughed and played, talking pretty nonsense, like a child sitting on the knee of a man that's fond of her. And I knew that it was all play-acting: that she was watching me all the time, and wondering how much I guessed.

At last I couldn' bear with it any longer.

'I've got a deal to think about to-night, Nellie,' I said. 'Would'ee mind leaving me an' goin' to bed? I've a deal to think about.'

I could see the fear in her face; but she couldn't afford to be weak, and in a moment she had thrown it off. 'Ah!' she said. ''Tis

no good for a married woman to look for compliments. Don't 'ee sit up much longer: 'tis eleven o'clock already. Promise me you won't be long.'

She put her two arms about my neck and kissed me upon the lips: I might have been her lover, and I came near to saying so. 'Good night,' she said, and I turned and watched her mount the stairs.

I heard her moving about in the room overhead, and it seemed as if I could see every movement that she made. Then there was quietness—she was praying—and in a minute or two she was in bed, and I was wondering what a man ought to do when he was treated as I had been. I couldn't think. I sat there hour after hour, until the lamp burned low and the stink of it filled the room; and all that I could do was to speak the name of her falseness over and over again to myself. There was no need of that: I had understood it from the moment when I stepped across the threshold; but the news had stunned me like a blow, so that I couldn't go beyond it and think out plans for the future. And so at last I rose and went upstairs, taking a lighted candle in my hand.

Nellie was lying with her eyes closed; the counterpane flung back a little, and her black hair all a-tumble on the pillow. I stood beside her, shading the candle with my hand; I couldn't believe that it was true, for she had still that look of an unstained child, and her breast rose and fell lightly with the come-and-go of her breath. But as I turned away there was a little sound which told me she was not sleeping, and that she had found it hard to master herself and fool me while I stood watching her so long. And then again my heart was hardened against her; I knew it was all true, and that this falseness was her very nature.

I threw off my clothes, and put out the light; in a moment I was lying beside her, and again I knew that she was only shamming sleep.

And I lay there trying to think what I should do, and every moment longing to cry out to her that I knew she was watching me, and all her falseness. I can't tell 'ee how long a time this lasted, but by-and-by I knew that she was really sleeping, and a change came over me; it was like the loosing of a string strained to breaking. And yet I couldn't sleep; I lay

there staring at the ceiling, a voice within me saying over and over again that Nellie was false.

I could fancy a dead man lying like that in his grave, and waiting for the judgment. But Nellie slept soft as a little child beside me.

This must have lasted a long time, for I noticed presently that the window-square was paling. It was just before the dawn, and a small wind whining about the house. And suddenly the door opened without a sound, and a man stepped into the room. 'Twas a strange thing, but somehow I didn't move nor speak; but I mind I wondered how he had opened the door so noiselessly, for a hinge of it was broken and always screeched.

The man came inside and closed the door behind him; then he moved about the room, not making a sound. I didn't see the face of him; to tell the truth, I didn't think of noticing it. I lay and watched him, as a sick child half asleep 'll watch his mother moving about his bed.

He moved to and fro in the room. Then he came and stood beside the bed, looking down upon Nellie. Her arm was flung up, with one

hand under her head, her lips just parted, and the long lashes black against her cheek. The first greyness of the dawn came through the white window-blind; and somewhere in the country outside a cock crowed faintly. There was no other sound.

The man stood watching her, like a shadow of the night; and I lay with my eyes upon him, not moving hand nor foot.

She lay so quiet and untroubled, I wondered presently what he thought of her: whether in his judgment also she seemed like an innocent child that sins all the more grievously because of its innocence. But all at once Nellie made a quick movement in her sleep.

'Neily!' she cried, and I guessed what had been her dream, and why she had called her lover's name in such tones of fear. She knew that I knew.

And then the man that stood watching her turned away from the bed and walked to and fro in the room; I could see that he was looking for something, he hardly knew what.

But I knew. Hanging up against the wall there was a sharp-bladed knife, which I had carried in Dakota, and which had been put

there for want of a better place when I came home. I watched the man, and I watched the knife; and presently he seemed not so much to see it as to remember it. He took it from the nail and tried the point against his palm. He stood thinking for a little while; then he came back to the bed and looked down on Nellie.

And I lay watching him, as I might have watched a shadow on the wall. I didn't think to notice his face.

A long time passed.

Then all at once Nellie stirred again in her sleep and flung her head back on the pillow, stretching her arms above her. The coverlet fell back, and her white breast shone dimly in the grey.

The man took one step forward and struck . . .

And I screamed aloud as I flung the dagger from me across the room. God knows it was not I who murdered her. Yet I was alone with my dead.

THE WIDOW'S HISTORY

I

THE Wesleyan chapel, a gaunt, unlovely building, scrupulously whitewashed, stood beside the roadway at a little distance from its point of descent into the valley wherein the village of Trevabyn was situated. Over against it, some fifty yards removed, was another building, standing in the midst of what had manifestly been a rick-yard at no distant period; the building itself had been no more than a barn until it was transformed into the Sunday school of the Trevabyn Wesleyans. From the early part of the afternoon this schoolroom had been the goal of some score or two of women and girls, all greatly excited and attired with particular gaiety, all laden with tea-things and edibles, which they carried in huge clothes-baskets.

Autumn had passed into winter. There had

been many days of bitter cold and miserable rain; for a short space, even, the ground had been hard bound with frost. But on this day the air was soft and pleasant against the face, the shining feathery clouds served but to show the infinite depth of the clear sky, and all along the road the shadows of the hedges on the damp ground were edged with an exquisite azure. Gulls and lapwings gleamed in the sunlight over barren fields.

Circumstances favoured the pleasant excitement of the village folk. Circumstances, indeed, could have done but little to repress this universal feeling. It was the day of the annual missionary meeting; no less than three regular ministers and many of the best-known laymen in the district were to be present together at Trevabyn chapel, where on more ordinary occasions you heard only a local preacher—a good man, and perhaps an able one, but still only a 'local.' There was to be a tea-meeting in the schoolroom; and since the weather was fine, it was expected that a multitude of people would come out from the neighbouring town, the head of the circuit: the good matrons of Trevabyn chapel were therefore more than

ordinarily anxious to make the tea—their part in the day's proceedings—a success.

Towards four o'clock a group of youths began to gather in the roadway, where a small, rutted lane turned in to the schoolroom. All were in the black clothes that betoken respectability; two or three wore in their buttonholes the pink monthly roses that open all the year round in the valley.

Towards these youths there came presently from the direction of the valley a girl of eighteen or thereabouts. She had a dark, passionate face; dead black hair, and eager, green-grey eyes. In the one hand she carried a pitcher of dull red, unglazed earthenware, filled with milk; with the other a great saffron cake was held against her breast. The group of youngsters made way for her.

'"Tis busy-all with 'ee, Marina!' said one of them, laughing. 'But where's Mark? I should think 'twas his place to carry your burdens; for 'tis but courtin' days yet, and then's the woman's time.' The girl blushed crimson, but made no answer; when she had passed from them towards the school a second youth broke into speech.

'Aw!' he said contemptuously. 'Don't 'ee *knaw* nothin', Johnny Kemp? Marky's courtin' days is over, for she 've given him the go-by. He had a wonderful good pay-day Saturday, and went into the "Three Choughs" with the rest to divide it. You know what fashion chap Mark is: one drop o' drink do make a fool of en. He had a glass or two, an' then he went out to meet Marina.'.

'Was â drunk?' asked Kemp.

'Drunk enough, I suppose; but none can tell what happened. Any way, after a bit he came back to the "Three Choughs" again an' stopped there all the evening, drinking hard, an' talkin' about the women in such a style that no one that ever owned so much as an old gran'mother (so they tell me) could bear to hear him.'

''Tis all over with him if that 's true,' said one.

'Ay,' said Kemp, 'Marina can't abide the drink, an'—come to think upon it—'twas a wonder to all that ever she took him.'

'Iss,' echoed another. ''Tis all over with him, an' though he 's a good enough sort, 'tis a thing you can't be sorry for. Marina was always too good for him. A man wouldn' like to think

Marina was goin' to spend her days with a drunken husband.'

This was a tragedy they were discussing, and speech left them a moment later. Mark Harvey's mother had come in sight—a woman little past fifty, but bowed and aged by a mysterious sorrow. She had come into the village twelve years previously to occupy a house which had been taken for her by the curate. She brought with her the son Mark, then a handsome child of ten; and from that time she had laboured hard to make a living. She had picked mushrooms and blackberries in autumn; she had reared a multitude of chickens; and gradually, visiting the town to sell these commodities, she had found people willing to give her employment as seamstress.

In the course of time she had gained the respect of her neighbours and become a recognised part of the village life; but she had hardly attained to a place in their affections. She had been very reticent upon the subject of her previous history, though manifestly not a woman of an ignoble past; and the matrons of the village had been puzzled, almost vexed, by the manner in which she regarded the various

incidents of her son's up-growing. He was a handsome, well-grown fellow, and they saw very clearly that his impatience of control was only the direct consequence of his abounding good health. He was something of a trial, no doubt, but still a son to be the pride of any mother. It was a sign of weakness, they thought, that, for all her passionate love of him, Martha seemed to look upon the boy with constant anxiety, and never for a moment with simple maternal pride.

Even the boys knew what an agony she had endured silently when Mark began to turn in at the 'Three Choughs' of an evening. They had been vaguely glad of his engagement to Marina, because of the relief it would give the widow to see him fortified against this temptation. And as she drew near, her face revealing her great trouble, they stood back from the lane and let her pass towards the schoolroom.

''Tis a poor world for the women,' said Kemp, looking after the retreating figure. 'I suppose Mark is on the drink still?'

'I saw him in front of the "Three Choughs" just now, as I was coming up along,' replied

another. 'He was quiet enough then, but foolish-like.'

The widow passed onward. In the yard beside the old barn they were boiling a huge kettle over a fire of brushwood and of sticks downfallen from the great elms that grew out of the turf 'hedges.' The pleasant odour of the burning filled the place. She crossed the yard, hardly seeming to observe a boy and girl who laughed and talked at the door of the school-room.

'Make haste, Mis' Harvey,' said the girl. 'There's a lot left to do still, and helpers is wanted.'

The widow opened the door and looked down the bare room. Eight narrow tables ran across it, spread with white cloths, and laden with food: great jars of cream, cakes coloured a rich yellow with the aid of saffron, and bread buns split and liberally spread with butter or with cream and jam. At each end of the long tables was a tea-tray filled with cups and saucers, a gigantic tea-pot in the centre. And at every table a number of women of all ages were preparing busily for the advent of the guests. Some were splitting bread buns, some spreading them with butter;

others were cutting the cake into massive slices. The rough walls of the room were whitewashed and hung with large paper banners bearing favourite texts; the lamps, as yet unlighted, were hung against the walls.

'Come on, Mrs. Harvey,' said a red-faced woman of fifty, attired in gorgeous mauve. 'Come an' help to split these buns. You may depend there'll be crowds here directly, an' not one but'll mean to eat his shilling's-worth.'

Martha took her place at the matron's elbow and set herself to help. She worked with quiet vigour, and for a space the mistress of the table was occupied in giving directions to another of her assistants. At last she turned, and again went on splitting the buns; then, looking curiously at the widow's face, she spoke.

'I don't like to speak of it, Mrs. Harvey,' she said, 'but I couldn' keep from saying how sorry I was to hear that you was in trouble again about Mark. What can the men find in the drink, I wonder?'

She paused. The widow made no answer, but fumbled with a bun she had taken from the basket beside her, and presently dropped it altogether. She stooped to pick it from beneath

the table, and as she rose the other spoke again.

'Is it true, what they're telling, that Marina Carthew has given him up?'

'I can't tell 'ee,' said the widow, piteously. 'I haven' heard nor seen her since. Don't 'ee talk of it, for pity sake.'

There was a little cloak-room opening out of the larger room at the end nearest the door. Marina had not been visible upon the entry of Mark Harvey's mother; but now she appeared in the doorway of this room. The widow saw her, and moved towards her immediately, abandoning her occupation.

'Come inside here a moment,' she said. 'I do want to speak with 'ee a bit.'

Marina yielded to her pressure, and in a moment the two women were face to face. It was the widow who spoke first.

'Dear child,' she said, 'you mus' know I don't blame 'ee, whichever way you do choose: no one can blame 'ee. But, tell me: have 'ee clean broke wi' Mark? Is it gone beyond mending?'

'I think,' said the girl bitterly, 'I think that if anything is broke between us two the

breaking has been Mark's. Love is a thing that don't die in a moment with the worst o' wounds; I would give my right hand now to have things as they were till yesterday. But I can't marry a man that drinks; I told him so, and he knew what he was doing when he came drunk to meet me last night. It is all over.'

'My dear,' said the mother with a piteous eagerness, ''tis a maiden's right to choose, an' the choice is one of heaven or hell. An' yet—do 'ee think there's no hope for him? Could 'ee try him once again?'

Marina's face was troubled.

'I can't believe 'tis any good,' she said. ''Tis the first time, since I said "Yes" to him; but there were many times before that. I'd give the world to have him made strong against this weakness, but I can't marry a man that'll ruin everything with the drink.'

'Dear child,' said the mother, 'I couldn' rest in my grave if I thought that through words of mine a woman had come to live with a drunken husband. But have 'ee thought of the words in the Bible, "Thou shalt be to him as God"? 'Tis a lot laid upon every maiden to be like God to some man or other: to know she can

take his will an' turn it as she do wish, for good or ill. Sometimes he lies upon the dung-hill an' all the world couldn' raise him. But a word from her'll make a man of him, an' may be one of the best: at least, 'tis the one thing that will make him try to rise again. 'Tis a maiden's right to choose, an' I wouldn' have it upon my soul that I was the one to tie 'ee to a drunken husband. But Mark is my own son; I 've toiled for him an' prayed for him, an' now I must see him goin' to his ruin, an' neither word nor deed o' mine 'll hold him. A word o' yours might do it. Will 'ee think of it again, dear chiel'? Will 'ee give him one more chance to save himself?'

Marina's strength had left her.

'I d' love him!' she cried. 'I 'd give the world for him to be strong again. Tell him I forgive him.'

She moved to the doorway, not caring to hear the expression of Martha's joy. A moment later Martha followed her into the schoolroom.

Two of the ministers had already come; they were now talking with Mrs. Philips, the lady of the mauve dress.

'Is it 'most time to begin?' she said to one of them—the superintendent of the circuit. 'I fancy we shall be forced to have two sittings, there's so many here. I should think 'twas time the doors was open: the tea is soaked.'

'Very well,' said the minister; and as soon as he had spoken the doors were opened, and the people began to enter.

For full five minutes there was infinite confusion. Here, perhaps, a young man was separated from the girl of his choice, and stood upon a form, striving, with vehement gestures, to attract her attention and bring her to the table he had selected. Many of the people had come from distant villages, or from the town three miles away; they recognised an old acquaintance in every guest, and must needs make and answer the natural inquiries after absent friends. Others, again, had come to the tea mindful of past experiences: they remembered that one hostess gave better tea than another, and were her table never so crowded they must somehow find a place at it.

But at last the bustle died down. Every one had now found a place; all looked up at the minister to see if he had apprehended that they

were ready. Then they looked down again, and he began to ask a blessing.

'We ask Thy blessing, O Lord——'

The minister paused, disconcerted. Even before he began to ask the blessing there had been audible in the hush a man's voice, singing very tipsily a song men sing at harvest suppers when the beer goes round—

> 'Tom Toddy is come home, come home ;
> Tom Toddy is come home,
> With his eyes burnt, and his nose burnt,
> And his fingers burnt also.'

Now the same voice was raised in argument with the keepers of the door.

'Let me be!' said the man. 'You can't keep me out. Marina's in here. Marina's goin' to give me a cup o' tea.'

'Get out with 'ee, Mark,' cried another voice. 'You can't go in like this. There's——'

The speech was suddenly broken off; there was a noise of struggling, and a moment later Mark Harvey entered, with a roar of drunken laughter, and stood dazed and swaying in the light of the lamps.

'Where's Marina?' he cried. 'Marina's goin' to give me a cup o' tea.'

Then he caught sight of the girl.

'Come on, Marina,' he shouted, while she stood dumb and motionless. 'Did we fall out last night? Why, come an' make it up, my dear.' And once again he sang tipsily—

> 'Shall a rough word end it?
> Sure, a kiss 'll mend it!'

And then the superintendent, Mr. Morecombe, stepped quietly to his side. He spoke no word, but took the young man by the collar and shoved him into the yard. Mark had been too surprised to struggle; but once he was without and realised what had happened, he began to bluster and swear. The people crowded round the tables made way half unconsciously for the widow, who had started from her place at the first entry of her son.

As she quitted the room there arose a murmur of astonishment mingled with indignation. And Marina, standing like a statue of despair, spoke bitterly—as if she had still in her mind the text quoted by the widow.

'Is there any hope?' she cried. 'Is there any hope?'

II

For Mark Harvey, at any rate, there was henceforth, in the judgment of his neighbours, no hope at all remaining. They had misunderstood Marina's passionate self-respect, seeing in it an ungirlish prudence and commonsense; but, though they misnamed the quality, they were nowise in doubt as to its probable effect upon her behaviour at this juncture. She was no light-headed girl, to be drawn from all serious purposes at the mere name of love. She could love, indeed, but was capable also of enduring the pain of love set aside, if it were necessary she should sacrifice herself. The villagers realised that nothing lying within the common circle of events could induce her to forgive the affair of the tea-meeting.

They came of a race which for unnumbered generations had gotten a hard living by direct conflict with the elements; they were good Christians, the most of them, but they were born fatalists. They looked on Marina's silent pain, on Mark's wild folly, with a constant sense of the inevitableness of all things happening upon earth. And it seemed that

Mark Harvey's ruin was a thing resolved upon by Providence. He was occupied as a 'tributer' in a mine near to the village: that is, he and divers comrades worked together, receiving by way of wages a certain varying proportion of the value of the ore they sent to the surface. This proportion varied with the apparent richness of the ground they were working, and was subject to periodical revision.

Now, sometimes it might happen that the ground deceived them, appearing vastly richer than it really was. They would accept a low proportion, or 'tribute,' on the 'setting-day,' and at the end of the month find themselves with only a pittance to take up by way of payment for their labour. Sometimes, again, it would be the underground captain who was deceived by the appearance of the ground. He would grant them liberal terms, and they—finding, perhaps, that the ground was unusually rich—would work with special vigour during the term of their bargain, send a great quantity of stuff to the surface, and receive a very heavy pay-day.

Such lucky bargains—'sturts' in local parlance—happened more than once in the next few months to Mark Harvey and his partners.

They were very flush of cash, and though they worked hard and regularly—knowing that their tribute would be cut on the next setting-day—they were only gone out of the village eight or ten hours daily, and on Mondays, according to a custom very prevalent in those parts, they did no work at all. Mark had plenty of leisure, and more money than usual; and the thought of Marina lost to him was never for a moment out of his mind. Often at nights the widow kept her lonely vigil, awaiting his return from the 'Three Choughs'; and any who had looked upon her face as she sat in her corner at the end of a white scrubbed table, a Bible lying unregarded before her, would have marked upon it an emotion—an awful fear, mingling with natural disquiet—that might have seemed altogether beyond the requirements of the situation. She was habitually reticent: even in private her features rarely expressed her strongest emotions. But in these long vigils she talked much in broken sentences to herself. And the burden of her speech still kept to one subject—the possibility of Mark's salvation by the influence of Marina, if she could but be induced to call him back to her.

'He 's the one good thing in my life—my son ; an' I must stand by and see him go down into the Pit. For the drink is stronger than me : something always was stronger than me with Mark. And his father. . . . Was it I that was weak? or was it the drink that was stronger—strong as death, cruel as the grave? May be Marina couldn' fight against it ; may be 'twas written he should die like his father. But Mark is strong—a strong man in all but this—an' Marina's the one living soul that can give him the wish to make use of his strength. 'Tis a fearful thing to be the wife of a drunkard ; but Marina might save him.'

She had manifestly a passionate desire to go and plead with Marina, to induce her to step forth and save this man that went so swiftly to ruin, receiving for the sacrifice of her just pride a soul that but for her was already lost. But she made no direct appeal to the girl. She loved her, had taken a strange pride in her strength and comely self-respect during the few months of Mark's engagement ; and now she hesitated to say a word that should induce her to link her fate with that of a drunken husband.

There was a secret in her own past life ; she also had once been proud of her youth and strength, and had known the bitterness of degradation for the sake of a man loved.

Meanwhile Mark Harvey fell lower and lower, and was alternately the terror and the laughing-stock of the baser sort among the villagers.

When the drink was out he was morose, ill-tempered, vindictive ; but once he had begun his drinking again he was a loosely talkative fool, a singer of old songs for the amusement of all that cared to laugh at him. He had been somewhat famous as a talker in earlier days than these ; now he was wont to set the great world to rights and expose the wickedness of women for the edification of all the idlers in Trevabyn. Marina's name was often in his mouth : he had told publicly and on many occasions the story of how she had cast him off in her hateful pride, leaving him the one consolation of drink.

On one such occasion—towards seven o'clock in the evening of a bleak day in March—he stood before the 'Three Choughs,' encircled with a little crowd of good-for-naughts.

'Marina?' he cried, in swift response to a

jesting speech. 'I loved her, friends; I chose Marina out of all the girls in Trevabyn. But she was proud—proud as Satan. I wadn' good enough: she flung me off, an' I might lie on the dung-hill for all she do care. Friends,' he laughed drunkenly,—'friends, I tell 'ee, women is without hearts or conscience.'

There was a chorus of laughter.

'Get away, Mark,' said one of the onlookers. 'You don't know what you 're talking of. You was never half good enough for Marina. She 's a good little maid, an' she done well to give 'ee the go-by.'

Mark looked excitedly around the group. 'Done well?' he cried. 'She 's got the heart of a mill-stone; 'twas cruel the way she treated me. There 's better women than her in——'

His speech remained unfinished. The surrounding crowd had turned away from him at a word from one of their number, and even Mark was sobered and silenced.

Marina was coming towards them down the street, and could not have failed to hear the speech of her old lover. For a moment it seemed she would attempt to ignore the event, would pass on her way through the village.

That this was her first purpose was obvious, but she was overmastered by her love of Mark, by a passion of sorrow to see him thus degraded. She swerved aside suddenly, and came towards him, laying a hand upon his shoulder.

'Mark!' she said, pleading passionately for the old love's sake. 'Come away from here. Come with me; come home!'

The young man strove to meet her eye, laughed drunkenly, and staggered, so that her hand slipped from his shoulder. Then the madness took hold on him again. He laughed with a horrid triumph.

'Hark!' he cried. 'Now hark, friends, to what the maid is saying of. I told 'ee she cast me off: I wadn' good enough for such as she. An' now I must go back to her upon the first word, like a dog to heel.'

He paused and clumsily mimicked the calling of a dog to the master's side. Then with a new effort after seriousness he spoke again.

'I 'm no fool,' he said. 'Would any man do it? She threw me off, but she threw me off for good. I 'm a man, I hope, an' not a dog, to come when she calls, an' go when she bids me go. So long to 'ee, Marina!'

Marina had hitherto stood silent. Now she faced the people with a gesture of despair.

'Go!' she cried. 'Leave me to deal with him. He will come, if you do but leave him to me.'

There was no disobeying the commands of one who spoke in the strength of such a passion as had inspired Marina to this act. The people withdrew clumsily, and the girl was left with her lover. For a moment there was silence between them. She could hear the crying of a young child in one of the houses near by, could distinguish the words of a song that was being sung in the taproom within. Then she spoke again, taking her lover by the arm.

'Come away, Mark,' she entreated; 'come home now.'

Mark had grown quieter now that the crowd of onlookers was withdrawn. He smiled foolishly.

'Come home with 'ee, Marina? 'Tis like old times come again to hear 'ee asking that. Of course I 'll come.'

And he talked volubly and disconnectedly of the great strength of his love, and of his sufferings in the weeks that were now ended,

while she led him up the hill that slopes out of the valley, and towards his home. Every word was a wound to her, spoken in that voice of utter foolishness. She could better have borne a blow than the reek of drink upon his breath.

The widow had long since finished all household work for the day. She knew it was useless to hope as yet for the return of her son, even though he should chance to come home earlier than usual. She was merely abandoned to sorrow, wildly questioning the justice of Providence, even while she strove to find some means of submitting herself to the hard will of God. But when she heard a noise of voices at her gate, and of unsteady footsteps upon the rudely paved pathway that led to her door, she was overtaken with a panic of fear. She took the lamp from the table, and held it above her head as she flung open the door and looked out into the dark.

'Who's there?' she cried. 'What do 'ee want?'

Mark was lounging against the low white-washed wall of the garden on her left. He laughed feebly as the door was opened. 'All right, mother,' he said; ''tis only me an'

Marina. We belong courtin' again. 'Tis all right.'

The widow looked swiftly into Marina's white face.

'Is it true?' she asked. 'Did you bring en home?'

Marina looked back at her with face set in a resolve that might have been utter despair.

'I brought him home. We two must save him.'

Then, as if she could no longer bear to look upon his degradation, she turned away into the darkness, leaving to the widow the task of inducing Mark to come within the house.

III

Marina had turned aside from her first purpose suddenly, and in obedience to instincts beyond her control. Once again she had linked her fate with Mark's, but she was still resolved that he should overcome his weakness. He pledged his word to her upon the morrow, when he had come to himself and realised the nobility of her act. Had she been securely married to him he would assuredly have resented the interference; now it appeared that

her act would indeed achieve his salvation. He had a strong will, if only it could be aroused in opposition to his inborn weakness, and it seemed that he had now a clearer understanding of the strength of Marina's love for him. He had been wont hitherto, perhaps, to look upon their engagement as a mere affair of 'keeping company,' a matter on which a man must expect to endure a good deal of laughter from his friends. Now he saw what that love meant to Marina, and he too became serious.

''Tis like a thing inside me, but not myself,' he said. 'There 's nothing else I 'm afraid of; and I can't believe sometimes that this is the master of me. 'Twas that way the night before the tea-meeting, when it all began. The rest had their drop o' drink, an' I thought I was a man and could afford to take a glass 'long with them for the sake of company. An' one glass, or two, would have done me no harm, if 'twas only me; but one drop is enough to make me servant of the beast inside that can't have enough of it; and so I stayed drinking until I was what you saw and scorned. I must put the thing clean away from me; for I 'm weak —weak as water—over this.'

There is but little need to fear for the man who has discerned his own weakness. Mark held himself to his pledge, and in a little while the village talked of him as a man snatched into safety out of the very depths of the pit. In Marina this assurance was a plant of slower growth. For the first weeks of the renewed engagement she had more of fear than of hope; but gradually, as he returned more and more to the full command of himself, even Marina began to hope, and after hope came confidence. The old fear died out in her with the growth of the year from spring to summer; and soon she had promised to become Mark's wife when the necessary arrangements had been made.

The widow's home was to be theirs also; for the feeling that they two women were in some fashion responsible for Mark's well-being was very real to Marina, and overcame any unwillingness she might have felt to have beneath the roof of her new home any one who might be tempted to interfere with her control of it. She had seen into the widow's heart in the past months, and they were very near to one another, having all their hopes in common.

It chanced towards the beginning of Septem-

ber that Mark was working 'night-chore'—from ten at night till six o'clock in the morning. He slept until early afternoon, then had some hours of freedom wherein to perform the numerous small jobs that were for ever being suggested to him by his desire to make the home worthy of his wife that should be. And now, in these days of autumn sunshine, Marina first tasted the security of perfect trust. Every moment of the present was a keen delight to her; every moment, it seemed, she was thanking God, who had again made it hers to face the future without fear. Many an afternoon she spent standing in the door of the widow's house, her needlework in hand, while Mark was busy over jobs of carpentry, or in laying out and ordering the little garden, with its narrow paths of white spar and box-edged flower-beds.

One afternoon she stood there as usual talking now and again to the widow, who kept within the kitchen. It was towards five o'clock, when she heard the pleasant clatter of tea-things being taken from the dresser.

'Did Mark say what time he'd be back?' she asked.

'Said he'd be back as soon as he could,'

answered the widow cheerfully. ''Twas pay-day yesterday, an' I fancy whether he 's set his heart on some bit of furniture, and do want to bring it with him as a surprise to 'ee. He jus' said he was goin' in to Tallywarn, an' wouldn' be gone more'n an hour or two. I mustn't wait tea for en, he said, but he didn' think there 'd be any need.'

'Well,' said Marina, 'if we don't wait for him, there 'll be two of us to 'tend him when he does come. And you may depend he knew it. Now, look! you 've got to sit comfortable while I put the things ready an' make the tea.'

She laid her needlework upon the dresser and quickly finished the arrangement of the table; then she stepped to the door, and looked up and down the road through the deepening twilight.

'My Lord the King edn' in sight yet,' she said. 'We 'll take him at his word, and begin.'

They took their time over the meal. When at last they had finished it was already dark, and Marina's first task was to light the lamp. Then she brushed all crumbs from the table-cloth, removed the tea-things they had been

using, and made the table neat in readiness for Mark's return.

'He's a bit late,' she exclaimed. 'No doubt he knew I should be longin' to find out what he'd bought to-day.'

A heavy sigh from the widow aroused her to a sense of the necessities of the situation.

'Well,' she said, 'he's fine an' late, so 'tis pretty sure he won't be much longer. I'll empty the teapot against he comes: 'tis poor trade when 'tis left soakin' a long time, an' bad for the stomach they do say.'

The widow appeared hardly conscious of the speech, and sat with countenance unchanged while Marina poured away the spoiled tea. Evidently she was wholly given over to nervous apprehensions; it was necessary she should be given some other occupation for her thoughts.

'Shall we wash up the cups and saucers, and so on?' said Marina. ''Tis a bit late, and what Mark uses can wait until to-morrow.'

The widow rose unwillingly and took her place at the girl's side in the small pantry. Marina talked volubly, manifesting a keen desire for information; but the widow seemed incapable of connected thought. She was for

ever listening for something; her eyes were for ever wandering to the doorway that opened from the pantry into the kitchen. Marina's confidence in her lover was unabated, but she could not resist a certain movement of anger against him. He had not told her on the previous evening that he intended visiting the town, and she had come over expecting to find him at home. She had forgiven his absence at first, supposing, with his mother, that he was gone upon some errand connected with the marriage, and that he desired the thing which he might purchase to come to her as a pleasant surprise. This had sufficed to excuse him until now; but in staying so late he inflicted a positive cruelty upon his mother, and upon her, his sweetheart, a manifest discourtesy.

The two women worked in silence at last, the widow still maintaining her attitude of strained attention; and suddenly she uttered a loud cry, dropping the plate she had been wiping. Some one had entered at the gate, and was knocking at the door. She caught the lamp from the table; then, moving hurriedly across the kitchen, she flung open the door, holding the light (with an action already

stamped on Marina's memory) above her head.

A man stood without, looking very anxiously into the faces of the two women. Once his mouth opened as if to speak; but the words would not come, and he stood gazing helplessly into their faces. Beyond the low wall of the garden a cart was drawn up, a man sitting in it with a lantern by his side, and a burden, apparently, supported in his arms. Marina, beholding this, was overwhelmed with a great fear.

'What is it?' she cried with fierce impatience. 'What is it you have come to tell us? Speak, man, for the sake of Heaven!'

The man drew a step nearer. ''Tis hard to be the one to tell it,' he said. 'Mis' Harvey, Mark is hurted very badly: was rode over on the way from town about a half-hour ago.'

The widow bent and gazed into his face. 'He's dead!' she screamed. 'Tell me, is he dead?'

'Ay,' said the man slowly. 'Lord help 'ee. Mark is dead this half-hour. He never spoke a word after they picked him up.'

IV

They bore the dead man into the house, and laid him upon the bed where he had slept every night since he came, a young child, into the village. The women had neither desire nor strength to question those that brought him as to the circumstances of his death. Indeed, with the knowledge they had of his past life, to see him dead was to know in what manner he had died; and the story, when it was told them upon the morrow, seemed to them both already an old familiar tale.

Mark had gone into the town and made the purchase he had been contemplating: the parcel, neatly wrapped in brown paper and tied with thin thread, was found afterwards lying by the roadside where it had fallen in the moment of his death. He had met with certain friends and acquaintances, and told them that he was about to be married; they had insisted he should come with them to drink the health of the bride, and laughed him to scorn when he told them of his promise to Marina. And then, drawing a foolish confidence from the knowledge of his strength in

the past months, he had yielded. One glass had sufficed to make him no longer master of himself. He had stopped some hours in the public-house, and was going home drunk to his sweetheart, when a heavy broad-wheeled waggon, driven rapidly through the narrow lanes by a home-going labourer, came suddenly upon him from behind, knocked him down, and killed him.

The essence of this story was known to both the women in the first moments of their bereavement, and made their grief the more intolerable. The doctor came presently, but he could do no more than tell them that Mark was dead. Marina, who had been so strong in the past, was now utterly broken down; she knelt like a wounded creature by the bed where they had laid him and wept unceasingly. But the widow, after the first moments of her bewilderment, gave proof of a fortitude of which none could have supposed her capable. The neighbours had flocked to the house, some, it may be, from ignoble curiosity, but most of them with the desire to assist two women grievously afflicted. But to all such the widow had but one reply: "'Tis kind of 'ee to come, neighbours; but 'tis little enough he do want

doin' for en now, poor dear! an' that little me an' Marina would like to do with our own hands. Would 'ee leave us, friends?'

As soon as the kitchen was empty she mounted the stairs with slow step, and set about the task of composing her son's body for the grave. A stranger looking upon the scene might have supposed her no more than a hired assistant; for she went about her work very quietly, and with no more than a conventional trouble visible in her face. Now and again she paused and laid a hand upon the girl's bowed head, uttering softly some word of affection, such as one might give to a child in its young trouble. And when her labour was completed, she stood by the bedside for a while and gazed fixedly upon the dead face. Marina was still sobbing brokenly.

The widow looked from the face of her son to the girl that loved him. For a short space she was manifestly perplexed; then she turned from the bedside and went, with a lighted candle in her hand, into the adjoining chamber, her bedroom.

She put the candlestick upon the mantel. Then, opening a small drawer, she turned over

its contents, until she had come upon a small box of white wood, having a picture of the Crystal Palace upon the varnished lid. She turned the key and raised the lid, displaying various relics of past years—a broken ear-ring, a silvered buckle, a ringlet of a child's soft hair, tied with pale blue silk. Finally she came on an envelope, yellow with age, and deeply edged with black. She took from it a little scrap of newspaper. Then, taking her candle, she returned to the death-chamber.

She laid a hand upon Marina's head, softly smoothing the wavy hair.

'Weep for en,' she said. ''Twould be sin if you was not broken-hearted, for 'tis a bitter thing to lose the man you do love. But thank the Lord, too, that you aren't ashamed to grieve, that you can let the world know of your sorrow. For look! look, and hark to me. 'Tis a bitter tale to tell, but I've kept quiet all these years since I came into the place, and I must ease my heart with speakin'.'

The girl ceased sobbing, and, turning, looked uncomprehendingly into the face of her companion.

'What is it?' she said.

The widow stood silent a moment, then she began with feverish haste to unfasten the bodice of her dress. She tore it open, and showed upon the breast, at the base of the throat, the great scar of some old wound.

'That is the mark of the drink upon me,' she said; 'that is the secret I have been keeping.'

Something in her manner had compelled Marina's attention, stupefied with sorrow though she was.

'What do 'ee mean?' she cried; 'what secret have you?'

The widow laid an arm about her, and drew her gently to her.

'All my days,' she said, 'all my days I have seen him lie, as he lies now, killed by the hateful drink. For so his father died, and his father's father.'

She paused as if to gather strength for the recital of her history. Then she spoke again: 'He came of a drinking stock; the love of it was a thing that each had from his father; an' when he came courtin' me Uncle did all he could to stop it. But I loved him: he was a man that any girl was bound to love; an' he promised me that for my sake he would be

strong against his weakness. Once while we was courtin' he forgot, an' for months 'twas all over between us: for I was proud as yourself, an' wouldn' hear tell of love from a drunkard. An' yet . . . I couldn' see en go from bad to worse for lack of a word from me. I called him back, and all went well until we was married, and for years after. Then——'

She thrust the scrap of newspaper into Marina's hand. 'All the world knew of it,' she continued. ''Twas cried an' published everywhere. The drink got hold of him again; there were three months of misery, and then he—he, that loved me like his own soul—did his best to kill me, an' died by his own hand. I came away as soon as 'twas over—I brought the child with me; but I 've known that the curse of the drink was in his blood. For this is the worst that comes out of the drink: that no man can himself bear the full punishment of his sin. He gives himself body and soul; but the souls of his children yet unborn are a part of the same price. Even when Mark was a child the knowledge I had was almost more than I could bear: from the first time he tasted it I could hardly hope at all, an' every moment was filled

with the fear that the drink would take an' force him to some crime.'

Marina interrupted passionately. 'There was no wrong in him,' she cried. 'He was good to man and woman. 'Twas only this one weakness; an' there's greater sins that take a less punishment than death.'

'Ay,' said the widow softly. 'Weep for him, for you loved him well, an' 'tis worse than death to lose the one you do love. But thank the Lord, too, an' think o' me that stood—near dead myself—to look upon the burial of a husband that was thought not fit to lie wi' decent folk. Ah, the rank weeds he fed! Can 'ee think what fear has lived with me, wearing the body of my own child?'

Marina was uncomforted. 'There are no thanks due,' she said. 'Mark is dead. What is my life to his?' And once again she abandoned herself to her sorrow, thrusting the widow away from her as she knelt beside her dead.

THE CHRISTENING

'TIS seventy years that I 've lived in Tregembo, and all that time I haven' been farther than Tallywarn. But I can't say I regret it. Even so I haven' found out all that is to be learnt about every one in this little place; but I 've learnt this much: that there edn' man nor woman you can meet that wouldn' be fit to put in a book if all the truth was known of them. Janie Daddow's first was christened this morning: why, I can mind when Janie's grandmother was the prettiest little maid in all Tregembo, and I half in the mind to marry her myself. But when I saw them go past this morning, something made me think upon the chris'nin' of Minnie Vercoe's baby, fifty year ago.

Minnie was a maid that always had poor luck. There was a plenty of boys came courtin' her, and if only she could have looked forward a few years she might have died the wife of a

man well-to-do in the world, and mother of prosperous children. But you must pay for your wisdom before you can have it, and Minnie said 'No' to twenty, and 'Iss' to George Tregarthen: fate, I suppose; and what must be will be.

Moreover, 'twas a thing you couldn' wonder at. He was a son to old Tregarthen of Nansistis, and, as you might say, born with his hands to the plough. But he was a bold-faced, black-eyed youngster, and before he was ten all the world knew that he was going to be a sailor, and see the width of the earth. He wadn' sixteen when he had a few words with his father on the night of Tregembo Feast, and went off before the morning, nobody knew where. He was gone four years, and when he came back he had the strength and the manners of a grown man, with ten times his old devilry. He stopped home a brave bit, makin' love to all the maidens, and tellin' tales that made the boys neither to keep nor to hold for months after. Then he went off again.

Three year an' six months later, in the month of June, he was back once more. I can mind the stir there was when he came into

church the next Sunday with his mother on his arm, and his black eyes wandering everywhere; I wadn' the only one by a long way that noticed Minnie Simmons was wearin' a silken shawl, the like of which was never seen in Tregembo before. A week later was St. Peter's Fair, and before evening every one was talkin' of what was plain to see. 'Tis a poor man that can't make haste when time is short, and George Tregarthen was never one to be slow. It wadn' a month before the banns was put up, and three weeks later Minnie Simmons was Mrs. George.

Old George was dead by this time, and the widow was fine and anxious her son should stop home and take his place. And you may depend Minnie thought the same. However, George wadn' willin' to settle down all at once. 'My dear,' he said, 'thee's took me all by surprise. I wadn' thinkin' to be a family man for years yet; but when I saw what a pretty little maid you was grown into I couldn' run the risk of findin' 'ee snatched up while I was away. Give me one more voyage, and I'll take to farmin' like a Roman.'

Well, the women had to give in. George went off to sea again, leaving Minnie to keep

his mother company. There was one letter came after twelve months, but beyond that no news of him for over two years. People almost began to pity Minnie, who had had so many chances, and now had nothing but a ring to show for all of them. And after two years news came that George's ship had been lost on the coast of Labrador, and all hands drowned.

It didn' seem as if this could make much difference up at Nansistis, but it was not long afterwards that old Mrs. Tregarthen died, and Minnie was left alone at the farm. She wadn' much over twenty then, and it seemed almost a sinful thing that such a dear little maid should be livin' all alone, a widow. She had a tidy bit of property, too. There was a good many young chaps that looked lovin' at her; and they said there was an old retired reverend 'rounder' in Tallywarn that would have liked to make her something more than a sister in the Faith. But no man ever had a kind word from Minnie until Samson Vercoe came into the place as gardener at the big house; and that was when she'd been a widow close upon three years.

He was a little bit of a chap, with fair hair

and blue eyes like a girl's, and an outlandish, up-the-country manner of speech. But he seemed to take her fancy from the first, and in the end he showed himself a better man than any in Tregembo. For about a twelvemonth after he came into the place 'twas told that he and Minnie had been courtin' on the quiet for a brave long time; and that at last she had given her word to try matrimony again along with him. There were some that said 'twould have been no more than decent, seein' she had no proof that George was dead, if she had made up her mind to put off Samson until she knew for certain she was a widow. 'But there,' said the most, 'that's a thing that'll only be known in the Day of Judgment; and what good would certainty be to her then, poor dear?' So they were married just after hay-harvest, and Squire had Samson for tenant instead of gardener.

Things went well with them. Samson took to farming like a duck to water, and from what I've heard he'd found out things that other people have hardly learnt in fifty years. And the garden before the house was lovely to look upon, though (like Susan's best teapot) more

for show than for use. Moreover, in the course of time 'twas told that more good luck was comin' to them; and presently Minnie was mother to as fine a baby as ever stepped. There was something about Samson, notwithstanding he was a foreigner, that took wonderful well with all sorts: I can tell 'ee every one about was glad there was such joy up at Nansistis. And two Sundays later, when the baby was to be christened, there was some chapel-folk that minchied and went to church. But it so happened that they that went to church saw nothing.

About five minutes before service-time Minnie, and Samson, and Minnie's sister, Hetty, who was going to be godmother to the child, came forth from Nansistis and down over the hill towards the church. Minnie was fine and weak still, but, do what he would, Samson couldn' get her to let some one else carry the baby. And, come to think upon it, I can fancy he was pleased enough to let her have her way, now that he was walkin' along beside of her. Hetty was on the other side, carrying the bread and salt: for in the old days 'twas thought proper, for the sake of good-luck, to give a gift

to the first person that was met as the party went to church with a baby.

It was a fine sunny morning in the latter part of July: the roads thick with dry dust, and all the hedges white. Down at the bottom of the hill they could see the church, and one or two people waiting about the porch to wish them good luck: though most of them were gone in already, to make sure of good seats. The larks were singin', I suppose, and the bells ringin', but beyond that all was quiet as could be, and even the bells didn' go so hearty as sometimes, for the ringers knew 'twas no use callin' when the church was crammed a'ready.

All of a sudden Hetty looked up and saw a wayfarin' man sittin' on the hedge beside the road. He was near black with sunburn; his clothes were all in rags and smothered in dust. Now, I fancy she was hopin' that a young chap she was keepin' company with would be the first to meet them and take the baby's gift. Anyway, being in her best, she didn' want to have dealin's with such a bundle o' rags as this. But there was no choice.

She took the bread and salt in her hand and stepped forth, her eyes lookin' anywhere but

upon the face of the stranger. 'Please to take this!' she said; and then she stood waitin' and wonderin' that the man was so slow. Minnie and Samson had stopped, too, and were waiting: no doubt they were as vexed as she was to think no friend had met them. The church bells stopped ringin': there was no sound beyond the noise of the larks.

And the man slipped from the hedge and stepped forward with a little blue bundle in his hand. 'Good Lord!' he said, laughing. 'It 's the sister! It 's Hetty! . . . Now what 's the meanin' of all this play-actin'?'

Hetty looked up into his face for the first time, and knew him, notwithstanding the great beard he wore. ''Tis George!' she screeched, an' ran back to Minnie.

But Minnie had seen already. She managed just to slip the baby into her husband's arms; then she fell fainting in the dust.

The stranger came forth, Hetty standing up against him and doing her best to keep him off. Samson stood like a man dumfoundered, the baby in his arms.

'What 's the meanin' of this?' he said. 'Who are you?'

The stranger laughed. 'The blessed saints only know the meanin' of it,' he answered. 'But I am George Tregarthen, and I had a fancy that that woman was my wife.'

So the baby wadn' baptized that mornin': for what's the use of a Christian name when the surname's whatever do come easiest upon the tongue? And a few days later Samson took the child away with him, out of Tregembo; for Minnie was dead with the shame of it. As for George, he sold the property and went off to sea. I suppose he was drowned sure 'nough that time, for we never heard tell of him in Tregembo again.

A CHILD'S TRAGEDY

WHEN Mark Hender died at two-and-thirty, leaving little more than was enough to pay his debts and bury him, it seemed that matters must go exceeding ill with Margaret and her children. But the widow was a woman of no ordinary force; and precisely because her husband had been the world to her, she came very early to a resolve that his death should be as little of a misfortune to his children as she could render it. From girlhood she had been accounted a very clever milliner; she had served her apprenticeship to the trade before her marriage; and Mark had been little more than a month in the grave when she opened her shop in the front street of Tallywarn. She had undeniable talent, and in the spectacle of her devotion to the boy and girl there was discovered an unfailing pathos. The business prospered from the first, and to Margaret's friends it seemed

that the children would presently go forth into the world unhandicaped by the untimely death of their father.

But at the end of four years the little girl fell ill. For days she had been languid, irritable; now she complained continually of a dull pain in the region of the breast. Upon the next day, seeing that the child had neither slept nor found relief, Margaret summoned the doctor. He came, and while he made his examination, Minnie sat upon his knee, her cheerfulness well-nigh recovered in the excitement of his visit. The doctor's face slowly became unwontedly grave, though he still talked—a little perfunctorily—for the amusement of his patient. Presently he looked up sharply at Margaret, who stood regarding him anxiously.

'She has had a blow at some time?' he asked. 'A blow upon the breast?'

Margaret pondered a moment. 'A blow?' she echoed; 'surely not. She may have fallen in playing.'

'It is a blow,' the doctor answered. 'Some one has struck her: by accident, possibly?'

Margaret had not strength to answer further. She rejoiced exceedingly that his eyes were

once more turned upon the child. For the colour had gone out of her face; her features were tortured with a sudden agony: she had remembered who it was that had struck Minnie.

She was glad as a soul released from torment when the doctor took his leave, giving her instructions as to the mode of applying the remedies he would send. The excitement of his visit had banished Minnie's languor, for the time at least; she was more like the lively creature she had always been when Willie came home from school; and Margaret, looking at her children as they sat with her for tea, began to hope eagerly that her fears had been without cause.

But when she was alone again the maid entered—a woman who had been with her from the time of her marriage, and so had come to be something more than a servant.

'What did the doctor say about Miss Minnie?' she asked; 'did he think there was much the matter?'

Margaret hesitated. 'She has had a blow upon the breast,' she said. 'She must have fallen.... It will pass.'

'A blow upon the breast?' exclaimed the

woman. 'Do 'ee mind how Master Willie struck her, one day back-along a bit, when she wouldn' play like he wanted her to? I thought she was hurt.'

Margaret interrupted, almost angrily. 'No,' she said, 'it must have been a fall that caused it. Why, 'tis a month since that quarrel with Willie. It can't be that.'

The woman eyed her curiously, fingering a knife upon the table. 'No, I suppose,' she said. But she afterwards shared with the mother the secret of little Minnie's death. And she had not Margaret's love of the boy.

The young widow was something of a figure in the town. There was a touch of the romantic in her story, and the children had always claimed attention by a certain picturesqueness of aspect and attire. The funeral of little Minnie might have been that of some local magnate, so many were the mourners; and from a hundred quarters there came the evidences of sympathy.

Willie was but eleven, and had been spared knowledge of the thing which had taken his sister from him; but he grieved for her incessantly, and Margaret had but little time to indulge

her sorrow, being thus involved in fresh anxieties for the child that was left her. The boy's school-life was not altogether pleasant to him. He was delicate, nervous, very highly strung; perhaps, also, he had been kept too carefully from the streets to mingle easily with other boys of his standing. He was clever enough at his books, and possessed of an intelligence that might some day develop into a real love of learning. But he never moved quite comfortably among his fellows, and sometimes—as often by their friendliness, as by their malice—he was rendered acutely unhappy.

They were playing a game of marbles one afternoon on the pavement of a quiet street hard by the school. Willie was the worst of players, yet found it impossible either to deny himself the excitement of the game or to be reconciled to its inevitable losses. In half an hour he was already upon the verge of a passionate outbreak, and it was then that he detected an opponent in the act of cheating. He started to his feet, ran forward, and snatched his stake out of the 'town.'

'Cheats! Cheats!' he cried passionately; 'I shan't play no longer. Johnny Penberthy's cheatin'.'

Johnny Penberthy rose to his feet very deliberately. He was a heavy, phlegmatic boy, and the charge against him was perfectly true. 'You 're a liard!' he retorted; 'I was not cheatin'. 'Tis only you can't play worth nothin'.'

Willie stepped up to him. 'Cheat! Cheat!' he cried again. 'You was cheatin'.'

'Look!' said the accused portentously. 'Do you know what you 're sayin' of? Put they marbles back in the town; an' if you do want to stop playin' when the game is done, you can go, an' welcome. 'Tis you that 's cheatin'. Will 'ee put them back?'

The rest of the boys encouraged him. 'That 's right, Johnny,' they said. 'Make en put them back. 'Tis he that 's cheatin'.'

They were nowise moved by Willie's discovery; Johnny's play was so exceeding bad that none of them was likely to be affected by his efforts to secure success. Moreover, he was vastly more popular than his accuser.

'Do 'ee hear?' cried Johnny, finding himself supported. 'Will 'ee put they marbles back?' He drew nearer to the boy and laid a clumsy hand upon his shoulder.

Upon the instant Willie struck out with

clenched fist, hitting his persecutor full in the face, so that the blood streamed promptly from his nose. For a moment the boy stood amazed at the sight of his handiwork; then Johnny was upon him, and he was blinded and maddened by blow after blow upon the face. He himself struck with all his force at his enemy, but most often he wasted his strength upon thin air, and when his blows were well directed they were pitifully weak. He fell at last, and Johnny knelt over him, holding him rudely by the arms to restrain his desperate struggles. 'I'll kill you,' he sobbed; 'I'll kill you, Johnny Penberthy!'

The victor suddenly set free his arms and rose in significant silence; Willie also arose, and the two stood face to face in the little ring of spectators.

'Boys!' said Johnny, addressing them, 'did 'ee hear what he said? "I'll kill you, Johnny Penberthy," he said. There was a boy hanged the other day, an' I wouldn' say he was much older than Willie Hender. Ay, an' there's others would be hanged if all the truth was known!' His voice rose higher with every word. The boys crowded nearer, and Willie—in utter ignorance—stood with eyes fixed upon

his enemy's face, intent upon the coming disclosure.

'Do 'ee mind he had a sister died? A pretty little maid, she was. . . . An' he killed her—like he said he'd kill me.'

There was a sudden noise of wonder and excitement. Willie alone spoke. ''Tis a lie,' he said; 'God took her. She was my sister. How could I kill her?'

'He killed her!' repeated Johnny. 'He struck her—struck a girl, his sister—an' the great bruise didn' die away, but grew bigger day by day, an' ate an' ate inwards until it touched her heart. He killed her; I heard our Martha tellin' Jane Cundy one day in the kitchen.'

Willie protested his innocence again, but they were all afire with indignation: so that even Penberthy was presently inclined to wish he had not spoken. They surrounded and followed him along the road, his protestations seeming to render them only the more implacable against him. One or two of the townspeople met the little band, but they counted the affair for no more than a common outfalling of schoolboys, and did not think of interference.

It was only when they had come in sight of Margaret's shop that Willie's persecutors allowed him to escape, while they stood to discuss the matter with a greater sobriety than had hitherto been possible.

Margaret was serving a customer in the shop, but saw at once that some evil had befallen her son. She dropped the fabric she had been displaying. 'What is it, Willie?' she demanded. 'What is the matter?'

The child threw himself into her arms. 'I didn't kill her,' he said; 'I didn't kill Minnie.' And he clung sobbing to her.

Margaret raised an anguished face. 'Who has spoken?' she cried. Then she bent tenderly over the child. 'No,' she said, 'God took her. She is in heaven. Go into the house, and I will come to you.'

The child went from her, and as the door closed loudly behind him, she returned to the task of serving her customer. But her heart quailed as she foresaw the future, when Willie must return to school, to live down among his fellows the crime of which they had been made avengers.

MAMIE'S DREAM

MAMIE still watched alone at the bedside of her husband. Two hours after midnight he had wakened out of the dull stupor which had lain upon him for many days, keeping him from all consciousness of her devoted tendance, from all knowledge of the horror of parting which was ordained for them. Waking, as if from a brief sleep, he had turned weakly upon the pillows, so that his eyes fell upon Mamie's face. He had gazed into it for a moment; then, as it were in a single instant, the bitter knowledge had come upon him.

'I am to die!' he cried. 'I am to leave you —and to what?'

Then Mamie had flung herself upon her knees beside the bed, and cried out in a vain passion of revolt against this disaster which was so relentlessly advancing upon them.

But presently her husband spoke again, 'Who

knows how long we have? I am to die, and in a moment, maybe, the thing will be here to cheat us of farewells. Or, if I live a little longer, perhaps it will be in dark unconsciousness. That would be like death's malice. And how shall I say farewell?'

She caught his hand; again and again she kissed it, like a creature distraught; and he lay back upon the pillows at a loss for the commonest words. They were to part in a little time, and he was worn out with the fever. How should he find eloquence for such a parting?

'I had thought,' he said, 'I had thought that there was a long time before us, during which I might labour to atone to you for the things you had suffered since you were my wife.'

'I am your wife,' she said. 'That is, mine always!'

'I had thought,' he said, 'that there would come a time when we should look back not unkindly to the days of our misfortune, since it enabled us to take both pride and joy in each separate advance towards the old comfort, as in a victory over hostile fates. I thought myself the master of a long life; and I was resolved that out of every day I would draw

some new pleasure for you. And now—I can scarce promise myself an hour of life; I am tired with long sickness. How, then, shall I speak the love for you which would have been still half untold though we had lived to go down together, grey-headed, to the grave? I am to die——'

Again she broke in upon his speech with incoherent and unrestrained sorrow, and he too lapsed into broken words of his great love for her, and of the hopes that now appeared but vanity. And presently, his hand still held in hers, he fell away from consciousness and lay quiet as a corpse. But the life still beat (though faintly) in his veins, and Mamie knelt at the side of the bed, hardly breathing, fixed upon the beating of his pulse.

She heard the ticking of a clock in the room below, and now and again the sound of footsteps in the street. A company of riotous young men approached, laughing and loudly talking, but had the sense to perceive the tan with which the roadway had been strewn, and broke, as it were, abruptly into silence. Very early the sparrows awoke on the housetops; she listened with a curiously strained attention

to their monotonous cheeping. And through the long hours of her vigil there was vouchsafed to her a vision of the few years which had gone by since they two met who were now at the point of parting: the years of happiness for which, it seemed, she must hereafter live in bondage all the days of her life.

Very vaguely, as from a time long since utterly banished, she recalled the simple life of her childhood and upgrowing; the little solitary village set down haphazard betwixt the wide untilled moorlands and the splendid sea. It seemed hardly credible to her that she who had now endured so many of life's hardships was indeed the same person as the girl whose life came back to her in pictures. She had in very truth entered upon a new existence from the day of the appearance of him who was now her husband; and though she summoned up the earlier days with difficulty, there was nothing so small among the events of the first weeks of their intercourse which did not remain vivid and real in her memory. It seemed to her that she had loved him from the first moment of their acquaintance.

Then she recalled her visit to his wealthy

friends, when, for all their kindness, she had found herself a little discomforted, and had realised that he alone was altogether her friend in this big world. She saw again—as one beholds the moving picture of a stage-play—the crowd that filled the grey old church, her father's, on the day when they were married. She seemed to hear the very greetings of the villagers as she passed from the church to the lych-gate. The most of them had known her from a child; and she upon her side had heard (and now recalled, each with its face) the history of each life.

Once more she saw the beautiful face of her father, the old clergyman, as he said farewell and blessed her; and she remembered that immediately upon this parting there had followed an interval of unalloyed happiness with her new-made husband, who was now to die. She looked again at his ashen face, and looking, was overtaken with a passion of rebellion against fate's decree.

At last their month of happiness had reached its end; she had entered with pride and delight upon her task of managing a household. And then, with never a word of warning that might

have prepared them for renunciation, the house of her husband's father had fallen in utter ruin. The old man, knowing himself hopelessly disgraced, had died a suicide: and Mamie's husband had fallen to an estate of utter poverty. She had borne herself bravely, taking a pride in showing with what truth she had declared herself prepared for any lot, so that it were shared with him.

But the struggle had been very arduous, and though five years had now gone by since the catastrophe, they were still in direst poverty. Yet there had seemed some likelihood of betterment in their circumstances a month before; her husband had spoken brightly of the future the very night before he fell ill of the sickness which must now take his life. Mamie could not reconcile herself to fate. Looking back, she beheld a space of well-nigh unbroken misfortune, brightened only by such interludes as served to show even to them how beautiful were the possibilities of life. They had fought as companions against their evil fortune; they had come near to victory; and now that death was coming to her husband, she beheld in it the cowardly advantage which alone could avert

the discomfiture of their enemy. Looking forward, she beheld the interminable years that she must live out in solitude, and her heart quailed within her at the prospect.

She stretched her clenched hands before her on the counterpane. 'It is so short a time,' she cried. 'We have been but five years together. If it is written we must suffer, let us suffer together, and not in aching loneliness. Give him back to me. Even though all else be taken, give him back to me!'

The sick man shifted his position a little, and moaned. She heard from the street below the sound of footsteps on the pavement. 'I would give my life,' she sobbed. 'I would surrender all natural hope of happiness. Only give me his life!'

She lay a moment in silence. Then there was a foot upon the stair, and Mamie rose as the doctor entered. He glanced at the patient without speaking, then advanced and scrutinised his face with a greater curiosity. And suddenly a gush of new life came to the woman who stood watching. For the doctor turned to her, his face eloquent of good tidings. 'He is given back to you,' he said. 'He——'

And immediately Mamie awoke from her dream of a night now more than ten years past. She looked about the sordid room, and in a moment all the youth went out of her face. She rose wearily and opened the door. She waited while the master of the house staggered drunkenly up the narrow staircase towards her.

In truth she had given much in return for the gift of his life. Behind her and before there lay long years of sorrow borne in aching loneliness, such as she had not guessed at when her husband seemed upon the point of death.

THE GOOD-FOR-NAUGHT

I

THE fidelity of Anna Tregea to the insubstantial memory of a man well known to be dead seemed only foolish to the people of Trevorrow. Even her father, landlord of the 'Lamb and Flag,' was moved to expostulate with her occasionally, pointing out that in the common course of nature he must presently quit the flesh, and that there were details in the management of the quietest inn which could not fail to be distasteful to a woman. But Anna had for a long time been the unquestioned mistress of the inn; her father had come to look to her instinctively for the word of decision upon all debatable subjects, and the habit was of such strength that he could venture only to suggest, even in this matter, where he believed her to err grievously.

It was a real joy to him—as proving his wisdom in reliance upon her judgment—when

Harry Bosanko returned suddenly and renewed his wooing of Anna, after he had been supposed for close upon ten years to be dead.

He had been in Spain. Tradition is ever careful to hold back at the least as much as it surrenders to mortal curiosity; it is not told by what means he explained away the utter heartlessness of those ten years of silence. But immediately upon the news of his return there followed the intelligence that he would marry Anna, as had been expected in the days before his disappearance.

It was told, further, that he had been all this while in Spain. His vessel had been sailing close by the coast of that country; some little chance befell which made him out of taste for the moment with the life he was leading, and so he slipped overboard one fine night and swam ashore.

'Ah,' said the hearers of his confession, 'they thought you must have fallen overboard and got drownded! They wrote and told us so; but Anna wouldn' give 'ee up. 'Tis wonderful, the wisdom of a feelin' heart, and passes understanding.'

It did not occur to them to wonder at his

frank confession of heartlessness. They remembered from the days of his youth his unfailing tendency to retire unostentatiously from any situation which he found irksome. Further, their fancy was tickled to observe the rewarding of that fidelity which, until it was rewarded, they had deemed mere foolishness. So far were they from carping criticism that they found Bosanko's conduct positively generous: poor Anna had by no means kept her good looks, and had forgotten how to charm.

So the young couple were married, all the town assisting at the ceremony; and when Harry Bosanko had taken up his abode at the 'Lamb and Flag,' old Mr. Tregea ceased, very naturally, from all active part in the conduct of business. He had no tales of foreign countries; he had not the younger man's dash and *savoir faire*. Quite contentedly he became a person of no account: an old man, to whom customers would speak heartily of old times out of their great kindness. Anna, indeed, attempted sometimes to have it appear that his authority was still existent; but there was not one who would support her, and in a brief while she and her husband were veritable masters of the inn.

It was in November they were married; in March the old man died, and a month or two later the swinging sign was repainted, and the name of Tregea gave place to that of Bosanko.

All through the following summer things went as well as could be desired. The new landlord speedily approved himself a person of astonishing enterprise; and if his foreign ways were somewhat disconcerting to the old gentlemen who until then had chiefly frequented the bar-parlour of a night, they were vastly attractive to those of a younger generation. On market-days the house was more busy than it ever had been of old; and some of the local gentry, young men of no particular occupation, began to spend an evening there very frequently. When the time of Trevorrow Feast drew near Bosanko made tremendous preparations, and the event justified his action. Never at that busiest season of the whole year had the 'Lamb and Flag' done so fine a trade before: even Anna, who had been of a notorious niceness in her father's time, could scarce find it in her to regret the very obvious falling off in the quality of the company frequenting the house. Bosanko

himself was sober enough: but the inn began to lose its ancient character for respectability.

But winter brought a change more gravely lamentable.

The season was by no means rigorous, but Bosanko was manifestly tormented by the rain which dripped eternally from ashen skies. The night never came early enough: he would have blinds drawn and candles lighted while the rest of the townspeople looked for nearly an hour of twilight. And as soon as the evening drew in and the guests began to gather, he put on a feverish gaiety. Throughout the evening he would talk and sing with strange excitement, seeming to strive vehemently to escape from that dulness whose mastery he had been forced to recognise throughout the dismal, rainy day. He talked sometimes of the country where he had dwelt so long: of splendid stainless skies, of calm strong seas, of the delight of lounging in the shadow of the ruined convent on a chief point of the neighbouring coast.

In truth, he was altogether malcontent, and through the slow-footed winter days was for ever unhappy as a strong tree transplanted into unfriendly soil.

And so it went until early in the second week of February. Then he awoke one morning to find the world all changed, and himself, as in a resurrection, changed with it. The wind was in the south, and overhead a sunny sky, cloudless, yet softened here and there by such a hint of white as one would leave upon a coloured fabric by the least touch of a chalky hand. The pine wood stood clearly against the sky on the little hill across the creek; it seemed to Bosanko he could well-nigh hear the voices of its birds, despite the intervening clamour of gulls about the harbour and above the waters of the creek. The awaited spring had turned in sleep, dimly knowing the time of waking near; Nature had seen the movement and joyously prepared for the activity it foretold. The landlord went about that morning with a certain sense of being hopelessly confined; the sunlight and the clear, cold air inspired him with the desire of high adventure; the little town afforded no field wherein he might exert himself.

Towards noonday he went indoors to have his dinner, and when the meal was finished and set aside he lingered for a long spell with pipe

and glass. It may have been two hours that he was thus unable to observe the course of events in the little town. Then at last he rolled a cigarette—a foreign habit—and stepped to the doorway, where he took up his stand with the easy air of a proprietor.

For a while he idly watched the circling of the seagulls, and very gradually his expression changed from self-satisfaction to discontent. Then he chanced to look in the direction of the harbour, and immediately his face grew brighter. A vessel had come in whilst he was at his dinner; at the very least there would be some talk of foreign parts that night.

He stepped within the house again to find another coat. Upon his return he beheld a spectacle that killed all remembrance of his intention to visit the harbour.

A noisy gathering of youths and girls was coming towards him up the street; they jeered and laughed at a strange-looking woman who walked in their midst, eagerly interrogating them in a foreign tongue, and with the same eagerness scrutinising the details of the street. All along the way the people turned to watch

the progress; some, after a brief pause, followed and joined the little crowd; everywhere the tradesmen were at their doors.

The woman looked no more than eight-and-twenty; she was of the slenderest build, dark-skinned, with strange black eyes and a wealth of dusky hair. Over her head she wore a kind of shawl of black lace; beneath there was a glint of scarlet. She was, indeed, of a remarkable beauty, but sorrow had preyed upon a spirit very rebellious, and her worn face had a lamentable pallor.

Bosanko had paused in the doorway upon the apparition of the group. As they drew near his face showed him the subject of a curious excitement. He looked eagerly at the black shawl, the glint of scarlet underneath, and seemed to meditate hostilities against the hooting mob. He moved forward, paused.... Then he stood waiting.

The crowd advanced; as they drew near there were some among them who looked towards Bosanko, knowing him a person of great joviality and desiring his applause and co-operation. But Bosanko was unaware of their regard; his face was set in a look of

tremendous expectation, and in a moment there was a new surprise for the crowd.

For the woman, glancing eagerly from side to side, had seen the landlord standing in the porch of the 'Lamb and Flag.' In a moment her expression changed to one of utter gladness. She uttered a cry as of incredulous delight; she broke away from the environing crowd of her persecutors, and in a flash was kneeling at Bosanko's feet, devouring his hands with kisses, telling the tale of all her sorrows in a foreign tongue.

Only for an instant did the landlord show signs of any embarrassment.

He glanced about him—surveying and defying the people, the ugly street: all that of late had made up his place of imprisonment—and in a moment the foreign woman was in his arms, and he was replying in the same outlandish tongue to all her questionings and confessions.

The crowd stood still and wondered, and at that moment another character in the drama came upon the scene.

Anna—who had stayed ten years single for the sake of the man before her—had heard the

clamour of the crowd, and come forth, with a natural curiosity, to discover what had caused their excitement.

Seeing her husband with a strange woman held in his arms beneath the eyes of the whole town, she stood incredulous for a moment. Then she advanced and laid a hand upon his shoulder.

Juanita drew herself away from his embrace and stood regarding this other woman. There was a long pause, during which Bosanko looked from one to the other. Then he stepped to the side of the foreign woman, spoke a few words quickly in Spanish, and faced his wife.

'Who is this woman?' said Anna. 'Who is this woman that dishonours me?'

Bosanko hesitated. 'God help us!' he said. 'She thinks herself . . . She is come after me out of Spain.'

Anna's white face grew whiter, more set in misery.

'She *thinks* herself? She is your wife?' she cried, half-questioning, and half-accusing him. And Bosanko let his eyes fall to the ground.

'She is a Catholic,' he cried. 'But she was my wife eight years in Spain.'

Anna looked upon him again, a great contempt apparent in her face. Then her eyes passed to the Spanish woman.

'Your wife!' she cried. 'God help her, then. . . . But you have chiefly wronged me, and now shame me before the town. Let us step within the house, and I will consider what you are to do.'

She moved away and entered the inn; a moment later Bosanko turned to the Spanish woman, and addressed her angrily. She answered, beseechingly, with a flood of outlandish talk, and as the man listened his face grew softer again. He glanced over his shoulder towards the inn.

'Come, then, child,' he said, holding a hand towards her; and so they followed Anna into the house.

II

The crowd gradually scattered, breaking up into smaller groups, and soon all the town was talking of Bosanko and the Spanish woman. There came no fresh news from the inn. Anna had her domestics well under authority; and though two or three of the most curious among

the people dropped in at the 'Lamb and Flag' during the remaining hours of the afternoon, they could by no means induce the maid who waited in the bar to recognise that any event of peculiar interest had happened. She conversed very distantly of the weather and such-like topics; and there was a something in her manner that made the boldest fear to linger unduly over his glass. Finally, as the twilight began to fall in, it was noised about that the door of the inn had just been closed, and that some who chanced to be near had heard at the same time the drawing of the bolt.

There was an endless variety of opinions upon the case, and each opinion was many times expressed during the hours that followed.

'Anna's case is bad enough,' said one. 'To think she waited ten year for a good-for-naught, an' then in a year found she was never his wife. 'Tis a great shame to bear, and a mercy she's not a mother. But 'tis the other I do pity. Ay! 'tis a cruel thing to lose a husband, and seek en in a foreign country, an' find him living with another woman.'

Others there were whose sympathy was all with Anna; while some spent their time in

wondering that Bosanko had ever left his Spanish wife, and come back to Trevorrow. ''Tisn' as if he was tired of her. His face went like sunlight after rain when she came forth, and spoke to him ; you could see she was the one.'

This view of the matter, indeed, was largely prevalent, and it was because they recognised Bosanko's love for her that the majority of the townspeople refused to see the pitifulness of the Spanish woman's situation. Long before dark there was some rumour of the thing which was to happen, and when the night had fairly settled in the shopkeepers were at their doors, and even the most respectable householders were on the alert for the first sound of disturbance.

It was towards eight o'clock when they heard the first outbreak: a hideous noise of pans and kettles beaten upon with sticks, of horns vigorously blown, and (worst of all) of shouting through a vast tin speaking-trumpet — an instrument used by the huers, who stood upon the cliffs when there were pilchards in the bay and directed the steering of the seine-boats by shouts and the waving of a furze-bush in either hand. The noise came from the direction of

the harbour, and thither the more volatile among the inhabitants immediately hastened. Very soon they were seen returning.

The central group — the 'kettle-band' — marched in the midst of a crowd that strove loudly to discover the identity of the musicians; they themselves had now desisted from their hubbub, and were content to hear the remarks of the spectators upon their demonstration. There had been scant time for preparation, but the occasion was one to inspire unusual activity, inasmuch as the credit of the town must suffer damage if there were not a prompt demonstration of indignation. So the youths had constructed two effigies, which were elevated on a couple of long poles, and carried with much comical swaying in the centre of the group.

There was little enough illumination in the old days of Trevorrow, yet it was still easy to recognise that the effigies were those of a man and woman. The knee-breeches and soft felt hat of the male figure showed that it was intended to represent the landlord of the 'Lamb and Flag;' the female figure had a black shawl over the head, and was decked out in

flaunting scarlet. The procession advanced, the groans of the crowd coming in great gusts, while the followers grew every moment more numerous. At last they had reached the 'Lamb and Flag.'

In front of the inn there was a considerable open space, strewn with a fine grey gravel of decomposed granite. A horse-trough stood there. Into this open space the kettle-band marched, with a renewal of its ghastly music, and the crowd followed, surging against the very door of the inn. There was a moment's pause beneath the unlighted windows. Then the crowd groaned repeatedly—and now with less of mockery than of fierce anger—and there were audible a score of angry voices crying out against Bosanko and the foreign woman, his wife.

Some one at the back of the crowd threw a stone which smashed a pane in one of the upper windows, and the people swayed backwards to avoid the falling glass. Finally there was a hoarse, united cry: 'Burn them! Burn the effigies!'

The suggestion was a timely one in the judgment of those who had the chief authority.

The effigies were quickly lowered and fastened to a couple of stakes driven into the earth. Then they were surrounded with combustibles, and in a moment a man came through the crowd, screaming excitedly, and bearing a great bundle of straw which he had lighted at the hearth of a neighbour. The fire was kindled and blazed up immediately, illuminating the front of the inn and the faces of the crowd. There arose a great noise of groaning, mingled with cheers for the blaze of the fire. And a moment later the door of the inn was flung open, and Anna appeared before the people, her face white and old in the light of the flaring bonfire.

For a moment her intentions were uncertain. The chief part of the noise died away, and only one or two voices were heard. ''Tis all right, Mis' Bosanko,' they cried. 'We aren't come out against you. 'Tis your husband we do want. Where is a gone to? Say the word and we'll duck him in the harbour—or in his own horse-trough.'

'Ay!' screamed a woman, a worthless creature who had often slandered Anna in bygone days, 'bring en out, and we'll duck en.

An' the foreign woman; turn her to doors and we'll do all that you could desire by her. 'Tis he an' she we do want.'

Anna stood silent and unmoving in the doorway, the light of the fire upon her face. Once she coughed, putting a hand to her mouth, as the wind blew the smoke in a great cloud against her. And at last she stepped a little forward and raised a hand, entreating silence.

'Hush! all of 'ee!' shouted a leader of the mob. 'Mis' Bosanko is goin' to speak. Now hark, I tell 'ee!'

The crowd pressed closer, treading upon the embers of the fire; there was a great noise of men and women angrily expostulating with others that intruded too closely upon them. Finally there was some sort of silence, and Anna spoke.

'You can go back,' she cried scornfully. 'If your business is with Harry Bosanko and the Spanish woman, his wife, you can go back and leave me to myself.'

There was a murmur of indignation at this announcement.

'I have asked for no pity,' she said again. 'He was never my husband, and I couldn't have

kept him if I wished for it. An' I didn't wish it—I care nothing for the scorn of them that think me shamed. So they 're gone—gone two hours ago with money that 'll take them back to Spain—back to his children and hers. And I ask you to go: you can do no hurt to them nor good to me.'

She paused a moment surveying them scornfully. Then her self-command was broken. 'Friends!' she said, with pitiful weakness, 'he was dead, as you all told me. The fool I was to think he lived!'

Here the matter ended. The crowd quickly broke up, one or two only lingering to stamp out the remnants of the fire. Upon the morrow the 'Lamb and Flag' opened its doors again, Anna reigning its sole mistress, as she had done in the time of her father.

She lived for many years, and to the hour of her death retained the respect of all; so that presently the story of her misfortune seemed —but never was—forgotten.

BEAUTY'S LOVER

It was a surprise to every one that Rosetta Curnow should consent to become the wife of Jim Penhallow. She had gained the name and fame of the loveliest girl in all the neighbourhood during the four or five years which had elapsed since she began to be noticeable among the maidens of the place. It would have seemed most natural if some new Cophetua of the countryside had raised her to the rank for which she was plainly made. Many who might have played the part had been seduced by her exquisite beauty to forgetfulness of the dictates of common prudence; and each had been vastly surprised when he found himself unmistakably rejected. Already there were wiseacres who declared that Rosetta played the fool in trifling with opportunities which would not always be hers. When it was told that she would marry Penhallow, the village cried out with one voice, proclaiming her mad.

Indeed, it was not easy to understand her choice.

Penhallow was but a common labourer, and so her social inferior. Moreover, he had the misfortune to be not exactly like other men, and was therefore looked upon by the majority as undeserving of their entire approbation. He was sufficiently industrious; he did not drink; and, though he made no great pretensions to religion, he was moderately regular in his attendance at the chapel. Perhaps his strongest characteristic was his love of flowers, to which he devoted the whole of his small garden, thereby scandalising a community essentially practical in all its views.

It is reported that the manner of his introduction to Rosetta was after this fashion.

She was going one day, dressed in her prettiest, towards the Big House; the roadway took her past Penhallow's cottage, and there she lingered, looking over the low white wall of the garden to where the man himself was working. The dahlias were almost over; but in the centre of the garden, where all could see, he had a treble row of chrysanthemums all in full flower. He was looking over them with

something of the artist's affection for work that is plainly good; and now and again he carefully removed imperfect blooms. Rosetta had stopped in the first instance to look at the flowers. Very soon she found herself watching the man and faintly smiling. And when at last he looked up and deigned to take notice of her she laughed outright.

'They're lookin' wonderful!' she exclaimed. 'But so would any flowers that had their treatment. They might have human souls!'

All this time Penhallow had been gazing at her with a curious look of surprise; Rosetta paused and blushed slightly, for it was borne in upon her that until this moment the man had never rendered the proper homage to her beauty. She had a sudden desire to win his admiration.

'Can 'ee spare me one or two?' she asked coquettishly.

A few seconds passed, during which Penhallow continued to stare at her, plainly wondering that he had never recognised her beauty until now. Then he stepped to the gate.

'Come and help yourself,' he said eagerly. 'Take as many as you mind to.'

Rosetta thanked him, and began rather

nervously to gather the flowers, while Jim Penhallow watched her. Presently he came forward, and, without speaking, picked cluster after cluster, until Rosetta told him she had enough. He paused, looking contemptuously at the nosegay he had gathered her.

'Well!' he said. 'Come again when you do want more. Good af'noon to 'ee.' And he watched her as she proceeded on her way, dexterously avoiding the pools that stood in the road.

Once, and once only, she glanced back, and saw that he still watched.

An hour or two later she returned, one of the young men of the village walking at her side. Jim was still working in his garden, but he kept his eyes fixed upon his work, refusing to perceive that Rosetta sought to greet him again in passing. He looked up as they retreated into the dusk, and immediately his resolve was taken.

People had hardly realised that Rosetta was being courted by Jim Penhallow, when they heard that the marriage was decided on. It was duly solemnised at the chapel, and Rosetta went to live in the cottage by the roadside.

'There's one good thing about it,' said a matron, discussing the matter with her peers. 'Rosetta's a sensible girl. She'll make him till 'taties in that garden and root up all his ol' flowers. 'Tis a rig'lar eyesore to see a good bit o' garden like that bringin' forth nothin' but a pa'cel o' flowers, that's good neither for man nor beast.'

As a matter of fact Rosetta did nothing of the sort. She became Penhallow's eager pupil, and the staid and sober villagers perceived with a sort of pious horror that the newly-married pair were living a life which was simply a prolongation of courting-days. Rosetta was manifestly well content with the husband she had chosen.

Once she confided to a friend the reason of her affection for him. 'Is it any shame to say I'm proud of my pretty face? A woman has failed if she is not beautiful: to one, or to many. And there have been many would have done much for me because of the face God gave me. But to Jim 'tis all the world. He would give his life for it—ay, and his very soul. And I can't but love the man.'

And so things went, until Rosetta was taken with a deathly sickness.

Penhallow seemed endowed with superhuman endurance, and for weeks he hardly slept at all. Rosetta grew weaker day by day, and daily there was a change in her bearing towards her husband. For a space she continued mindful of her beauty: she would ask frequently to be given a mirror, that she might know what injury had been wrought by sickness against her good looks.

But gradually, as the strength left her, she forgot her attitude of superiority: she seemed to long passionately for a simple human love that should be hers merely because she was herself. Penhallow did not understand, and still treated her rather as the incarnation of all loveliness than as a simple human creature. When he was told that she must surely die, he was taken with an insanity of grief; but he spoke as one believing that it lay with her to consent or refuse to accept the change of death.

And while he cried on her as to a creature of Divine attributes, Rosetta, conscious of mortal infirmity, yearned for some expression of a love for that part in her which suffered or was glad, which would be still the same

though her beauty had been long ruined by accident or the relentless hand of time. But very soon she was overtaken with a heavy torpor, and lay unconscious with the mark of death upon her.

The last night came. Penhallow's grief had been hardly human. He had watched rebelliously the dreadful change which made her face a livid and inhuman mask; now it appeared he had forgotten his old passion, or, rather, that he could not be persuaded that this creature of so hideous an aspect was indeed the wife whose beauty he had worshipped. The night went on. The husband had with him an old woman of the village accustomed to the work of watching. From time to time she endeavoured to comfort him; but presently she ceased from troubling: she was, indeed, disconcerted, and in some degree affrighted, by the man's demeanour.

He was watching the still figure of his wife as if held fast by some horrible attraction. Her face was all discoloured, distorted to the semblance of an obscene mirth; through the shut eyelids a narrow line of the eyeball glistened. And it seemed to the husband,

standing by, that this unsightly body was no longer inhabited by the spirit of his wife: she was gone from it, leaving it to become the ambuscade of a fiend, whose evil nature now reinformed its features.

Presently he began to mutter incoherently, seeming wholly unconscious of everything save that dreadful face which mocked him. The nurse had almost forgotten the patient in growing fear of Penhallow. Presently she could no longer be quiet. She rose and moved to his side; then, finding he gave her not the slightest attention, she took him by the arm and shook him roughly. Doubtless, some sharp remonstrance was in her mind, but she had no time for speech.

Penhallow started at the touch of her hand; then he laid a hand upon her shoulder and spoke, regarding her with vacant eyes. 'It is not Rosetta,' he said. 'Night and day I watched, and she lay there beautiful in sickness as she was before. Look at this thing that lies where she lay. It is not Rosetta; I am afraid of it.'

He paused, and the old woman strove ineffectually to bring him back to reason.

'Your head is light, Jim, after so much watching. No wonder! Lie down a bit, an' I'll see that Rosetta's all right.' Her tones became more urgent as she recognised the uselessness of her entreaties. 'Be quiet, man,' she cried. 'Don't 'ee know Rosetta's near to death?'

And the man laughed aloud.

'Rosetta's gone this long time,' he said. 'She was beautiful. This thing . . . it is a devil. I am afraid of it.'

He walked clumsily to the door.

'I can't stay under the same roof with it,' he said, as he left the room. A moment later the nurse heard him quit the house, and when the sound of footsteps had died away she turned to the bedside again.

Rosetta was regarding her curiously with wide-open eyes; her face had once more changed, so that Penhallow, could he have seen her, would have known that she was in very truth the wife he had loved. And while the nurse still wondered Rosetta spoke, weakly, but very eagerly. 'Where is he gone to?' she asked. 'What was it he said?'

The nurse strove to quiet her curiosity.

'He's gone out to get a mouthful o' fresh air,' she said. 'He've been watchin' with 'ee night an' day, this long time past. He didn' say nothin' particular.'

But Rosetta was not deceived.

'Give me the looking-glass,' she said; and when the nurse had brought it she raised herself laboriously and studied her face in the glass. And presently she fell back upon the pillows with a sob. 'He spoke true,' she said. 'But it was cruel. Yet from that moment she progressed towards recovery.

Thirty years later, on a most dismal autumn day, I drove up to The Crown, an hotel whose front commands a full view of the single narrow street which constitutes the town. I could not attract the attention of the hostler, and discovered that every one was greatly interested in a funeral that came slowly down the street. There were hardly half a dozen mourners; and these, so far as one could judge, were by no means deeply afflicted. A moment later, as the procession came nearer, I perceived that the interest of the people centred rather in a small shop at the roadside than in the funeral

itself. The shutters were up, the door closed, the white blinds of the small upstairs windows drawn.

And as the bearers reached this point the door was opened and a tall woman, dressed in deep mourning, stepped into the roadway. She took her place in the procession. She held a black-edged handkerchief to her dry eyes. A small crowd had gathered, and now followed the coffin. In a little while the funeral had passed out of sight in the direction of the cemetery. Inquiring afterwards, I learned the story I have told, with its concluding passages.

From the night when he left her to die alone Rosetta hardly spoke again to her husband. He was found the next morning wandering at a great distance from the village; coming home, he met the doctor quitting the cottage, and from him he heard that his wife would live. And from that hour, his madness over, he tended Rosetta with more than the old devotion. When she was sufficiently recovered he got the loan of a spring-cart, and offered to take her for a drive in the fresh air. 'Take me home,' she said. 'Take me to see

mother.' And she was strangely impatient to start.

She was still silent, but for Penhallow there was sufficient joy in the contemplation of her beauty, which rapidly came back to her. They reached the cottage, and drove into the little yard. Penhallow helped his wife to descend, and almost carried her to the open door. Then he went back to lift the cushions out of the cart; but, hearing a sound behind him, he once more turned.

Rosetta had shut the door; even now he heard her fastening the bolt. And immediately, with a strange understanding of the thing which had befallen him, he dashed forward and began to hammer with his fists upon the panels, crying, 'Open the door, Rosetta! Let me in!'

A faint laugh reached him.

'Go back alone,' she said. 'Did you not take me for better or for worse? And because I had been sick a long time, and had lost my good looks, you would have let me die alone. You shall live alone. Go back, and do not fool yourself with hoping.'

It would seem that Penhallow realised—perhaps one should rather say he was a fool to

believe—that her resolve was inexorable. At any rate, it is said he never once troubled his wife again. When she had quite recovered her strength she opened a small shop in the village; being, further, a skilled needlewoman, she found it very possible to make a living. And, though there were many attempts to shake her resolution, she lived until the day of Jim Penhallow's funeral as if he had ceased to exist when she sent him from her at the door of her mother's cottage.

THE WISE WOMEN

'All the refuse of the city
Ever drifting to the sea:
Foulness of the river merging
In the sea's cold purity.

'Is the current fouled, encumbered
With God's failures? There doth lie
A vast sea beyond the river,
And the saddest soul must die.'

IN a lonely cottage on the slope of the coombe that opens from Pentreath beach into the moorland, lived a man for whom there was very little left in life. More than thirty years earlier he had been cast ashore one wild night when God fought on the side of England against the power of Spain. For weeks there were bodies thrown up on the beach daily, to be buried by the villagers in great pits dug at the mouth of the coombe.

Only this man, José, came alive to the land.

At first he lived very miserably, being a stranger, and so hated by the village-folk. But among these was a young girl, Genefer Tre-

garrick, who had perhaps something of his own ancestry. She was black-haired, dark, passionate; it seemed to him that she also was a stranger in the land, and he turned to her instinctively, as if to a woman of his own country. Probably he loved her in the beginning less for herself than because she brought back to him all that was dearest among his memories. But, in her, blood answered to blood: she loved him with a love beyond his understanding. And so, when he had dwelt but a few months in the village, they were married—each knowing hardly ten words of the other's language.

They had few friends among the folk surrounding them, and God laid upon them the bitter burden of childlessness, so that they clave all the more closely to one another, and became as one soul. The man was a stranger in a strange land, yet it was Genefer who changed most in the years that followed. In the course of time he learned just so much English as sufficed for conversation with the villagers, and presently they came to love him, for the sake of his hesitating, gentle speech and foreign courtesy.

But Genefer had learned his language so that it seemed her native speech. To a generation little later than her own she was yet more of a foreigner—less comprehended—than José himself. When it was necessary to protect his interests, however, she had forgotten nothing of the wisdom gathered in childhood. And when she died, after thirty years, it seemed that a blow had been struck at the very roots of his life.

The people forgot that he was a foreigner: more accurately, they were mindful of his utter loneliness, and, because of it, dealt with him very kindly. The women, especially, vied with one another in little benefactions, and the man thanked them with an unfailing courtesy, which pleased and flattered even those who would have found it an excuse for laughter but a little earlier. But he grew peaked and thin; his eyes were large and bright. 'The warmth is gone out of the sun,' he said, pitifully, one day; and it was evident he was dying merely because there was no purpose or delight left him in life.

This fact the women could not fail to recognise. They had grown to look upon him as a sort of child, and made a hundred efforts

to arouse him. And at last, when prayer itself would have been vanity, a woman came to his cottage and besought him to seek a cure. She found him sitting in the sun, his hands slack upon his knees, his eyes fixed mournfully upon the little stream which ran seawards in the bottom of the coombe.

She looked at him with anxious pity. 'I tell 'ee,' she said, 'you'm very bad. I can't fancy you 'll live long if there edn' some change.'

José regarded her very kindly. 'The good God knows,' he said. 'It is likely you speak true.'

'Ay,' said the woman, 'all too true! I could wish I were not so sure. But look! Will 'ee do what I ask?'

Again the man looked at her gently. 'Surely,' he said, 'if it is possible.'

She came nearer. 'Do 'ee know the cottage betwixt here and Pentreath by the cliff-path? There 's a wise woman do live there, Martha Gilbert, that have cured many. Will 'ee go and ask her what you shall do? Will 'ee go to-night? 'Tis a chance for 'ee.'

And José promised he would go.

'They tell me you are wise,' he said, as the

woman met him at the door of her cottage. 'I have a pain—of the heart, I think: a pain smaller than the hurt of a cut finger, and yet it takes my life. I have no fear to die, but I was sent.'

The woman looked upon him with impassive face, yet once there was a movement, suddenly arrested, which might have ended in such a caress as a mother of happy children would give to some strange child that wept uncomforted. 'She did well who sent you,' she answered. 'I have been taught many things since I came into the world. You would have me cure this pain?'

He smiled gently. 'If it please you,' he said.

There was an outbreak of feeling in Martha's voice, and the tears started to her eyes. 'It is the good God will do it,' she said. 'Sit you down awhile, for there is need of two.'

José seated himself upon a rude bench which stood against the mud wall of the hovel, and waited very contentedly, looking out over the fading purple of the heather to where the sea showed in the west. The sun had fallen below the level of the cliffs; so great a quiet brooded over the moorland that the man half fancied the cure was wrought already.

And so he did not observe the return of the Wise Woman until she stood at his elbow; a look of surprise came to his face, for he saw that her companion was a sinful creature of the village, a woman for whom even her own people had no longer pity nor love. She was hardly older than Genefer had been when she became his wife, and still she kept the ruins of the beauty God had given her to her undoing. José had been kinder to her than most, having a natural sympathy with all outcasts and strangers. But he did not understand her presence now.

She also seemed oppressed with a sense of intruding. She looked once at this man from whom she had suffered no unkindness. Then her eyes fell and she waited.

But the Wise Woman spoke. 'There must be two,' she said. 'She is wise as I am wise: she has suffered.' She paused; then, with a change of voice, 'Now let us go to the stream in the coombe. The stream shall cure 'ee.'

No word was spoken as the three followed the beaten track through the heather. But when they had come to the edge of the coombe Martha turned and looked back into the grow-

ing twilight. 'Look back!' she said, and she watched him secretly as he turned and looked back, a great peace at his heart, into the world with which he had finished.

A moment later they were descending to the bottom of the coombe. She found a clump of heather which grew where the little stream was narrowest, and here she bade the man lie down. He obeyed her quietly and without a question. Then the younger woman stepped across the stream and stretched a hand towards her companion. Martha took it, standing so that the man was under the joined hands.

'Say the words that we do say, as we do speak them,' she said. And then the two women, standing with joined hands, repeated this old verse very slowly, the man following as he was able, very carefully, yet in a voice which showed he had no care as to the import of the words. For already his pain grew less, and a great contentment filled his heart.

'Stream, take my pain from me,
Bear it along with thee
Into the deepest sea:
Stream, take my pain from me.'

There was a pause when the words were ended. Then the Wise Woman dropped her companion's hand and bent over the man. 'There is no more,' she said. 'You must lie there until the sun is up, and then your pain will be gone.'

José did not answer; the younger woman stepped across the stream and rejoined her elder. Once she looked back into the shadow as she mounted the coombe-side. But Martha laid a hand upon her arm. 'His pain will be gone by morning,' she said, as they gained the summit.

She had spoken truly. For in the morning, when the sun was hardly risen and the thin hoar unmelted, she returned alone to the place where she had left him. He had not moved, and she knew as she looked on the cold face that the sea had in very truth taken away his pain.

THE SISTERS

I

SIXTY years ago the farmhouse yonder among the sycamores on the slope of the coombe was occupied by John Trewhella. He was but a poor man, and one daughter, Nancy, was away in service; but Jennett, the elder sister, stopped at home, her mother being long dead. Now, Jennett was a pretty enough maid when Nancy did not happen to be by; but Nancy would have been better than the best in any company. After some 'time, it came about that George Penhalleck, a young blacksmith living in the village, cast eyes on Jennett, and presently began to keep company with her. I 've heard —though it must have been many years later— that she was a hard mistress to him, always tormenting him with orders and fancies out of all reason. However, 'tis to be supposed he was very much in love, for as time went on he was almost the only one about the place who

could stand her lofty airs. I was a child at the time, and I mind I was always afraid of her.

Now, I should have said that Nancy was very delicate upon the chest. Perhaps it was that which gave her the chief part of her loveliness: cheeks like June roses, and a skin like elder bloom. It was because of this that she had gone away from home. You will not need telling how bleak a place this is; and the farmhouse yonder stands full in the way of the east wind. So Nancy was servant to an old maiden lady, pretty well up in the world, and with so much money you might have wondered she had missed finding a husband. She lived at Trenear. I fancy the girl must have been almost like a daughter to the old lady, for whenever she came back to spend a day or two at the farm, her dresses were the talk of the place (though never fine beyond modesty), and her manners something wonderful.

The blacksmith was almost a new-comer to the place, and it so happened that during the whole time of his courting, Nancy was never at home. She did not come back until close upon six months after the match was made up. Then the old lady wrote to say that Nancy

was seeming a little poorly and in need of a change, and that she would come by the coach the next afternoon to stay for a few weeks.

Sure enough she came. It was just four o'clock when the coach came up the hill, and stopped to set down the passenger and her luggage where the path crosses the fields. And Nancy was looking prettier than ever. She was always glad to be at home again; her eyes were bright as stars, and her cheeks prettily flushed. And she was no sooner in the house than she set about teasing her sister.

'My dear Jennett,' she said, 'I couldn' believe it when I heard the news: I never could fancy a man having the courage to ask you to keep company. What fashion man is he, at all; and art very hard upon him?'

Jennett was not one to take jesting of this kind in the best of spirits; but Nancy seemed to take no heed of the danger.

'I can see how 'twill be,' she said, a little later: 'before many days are gone I shall have the poor dear coming to me to ask for just a little kindness. There never was a man afraid of me, somehow. Is he very much in love, Jennett?'

You can't live to my age without coming almost to believe that there's a Book of Fate, in which our lives are all written out beforehand. It so happened it was Nancy went to the door when George Penhalleck, the blacksmith, came. He was a big, dark-faced chap, with black curly hair, and a rather serious look. And Nancy laughed all over her pretty face and made him a wonderful curtsey.

'Come in, brother-in-law,' she said.

The girl was good as gold by all accounts, and none ever dreamed of saying that she had set herself to steal away her sister's sweetheart. But she was young and very thoughtless, and did not know the full power of her beauty: looking upon George Penhalleck as an engaged man, and so, as you might say, in a place of safety. Nevertheless, the poor young man was tried as by fire that night, and from that time forth. Perhaps it was even as Nancy had said in jest—that Jennett asked too much from her lover, being by nature hard. Nancy was her very opposite, and was always laughing at the young man's serious face, and doing all she could to infect him with her own high spirits. And soon she began to succeed. George came

more frequently than ever to the farmhouse, and if Nancy happened to be out of the way he would hardly try to conceal his disappointment, and would be a very different person from what he was when she was there.

Once or twice there were words between the sisters; but Jennett always had been hard on Nancy, who was younger by three years, and that did not seem to be anything out of the way. But one evening it happened that she was in the dairy when her sweetheart arrived. As she came back, and stood at the door of the kitchen, she heard her sister and Penhalleck talking and laughing inside. She waited a moment; then she entered, and the laughter died away at once. Nancy and Penhalleck were silent and a bit shamefaced. And Jennett stood and looked at the two without speaking, something beyond mere anger in her face.

'Go on,' she said at last; 'I should be very loth to be in any person's way.'

Before they had time to make any answer, she had walked across the kitchen and mounted the stairs to her bedroom.

That—if it had not been already too late—should have warned them of what they were

doing; as it was, it can only have served to show them how deeply in love with one another they were. But, of course, there was no word said between them at the time. Nancy ran upstairs after her sister, and coaxed her into coming down; and to all appearances things were quite smoothed over again. Nancy even found courage to joke about the matter before the night was out: being, perhaps, more anxious to deceive Penhalleck than her sister. But things were gone too far to be stopped now. A day or two later I went birds'-nesting in the coombe that runs inland from Trelynt beach; there's a little oak wood on the western slope, and one could fancy the place had been a haunting-ground of lovers from the beginning of Time, the spring comes there so beautifully. Now, it so happened that I heard voices; and, being but a boy of ten, and very full of mischief, I made my way through the tangle of hazels in the direction of the sound. And when I had seen who was there I turned back, and went away quietly as I had come. For the two I had heard talking were George Penhalleck and Nancy; and Nancy was crying bitterly, her face hidden in her hands. 'Don't

tell her,' she sobbed; 'don't tell her! I will go away. It is all my fault.'

Somehow I felt as if I trespassed: as if the whole place belonged to them. So I made towards the edge of the wood, going softly at first, and then more boldly. And just on the edge of the open ground I almost stumbled into the arms of a pale-faced woman who stood alone by the tall trunk of an elm-tree. It was Jennett Trewhella.

'Little boy,' she said, 'is there any one in the wood.'

I was afraid of her and wanted to get away, and so I blurted out what I should have kept to myself. 'Ay,' said I, 'the blacksmith's in there talkin' to your sister, and she's cryin' like rain.'

Upon this I would have gone upon my way. But she stopped me with a gesture, and looked me up and down. 'Listen,' she said. 'Take off the garter from your right leg, and come in an hour's time to the cowshed in the eight-acre field. Will you do this?'

I would have given the world to refuse, but there was that in her face which forbade the exercise of my free-will. I promised and ran

on, leaving her still solitary on the outskirts of the wood.

Even when I had left her, the mastery of her look was upon me; so that at the time appointed I came to the cowshed in the eight-acres. 'Tis a field lying some two or three hundred yards up the coombe beyond the farm-house yonder. According to orders I had taken off my right garter and carried it in my hand; and, to tell the truth, I recalled a host of awful stories as I went to meet Jennett: wondering, among other things, whether this my own garter would be used to bind my limbs in preparation for some dreadful death.

The cowshed stood in a corner of the field, a few rough uprights supporting a roof of smaller poles thatched with grey furze-fagots. And here Jennett stood waiting for me, bare-headed, her face more pale than ever. I noticed as I advanced that she had a book in her hand; then she beckoned to me with an impatient gesture, and I ran on. She did not speak when I reached the shed, but laid the book (which I now saw to be a Bible) upon the ground, and took the garter from me. Then she bent down and turned over the leaves of

the Bible until she had found the passage she required; having found it, she produced a big door-key, and closed the book upon it as if it had been a book-marker. The ring of the key projected beyond the top edge of the book. Next she took the garter I had given her and bound it about the Bible; repeating the process with a second garter, taken from her own pocket. Then she raised the book by the ring of the key to prove that it was tightly bound, 'That will do!' she muttered, and turned to me. 'This is a Bible,' she said fiercely. 'Put your hand upon it and swear that you will never breathe a word of what you are to see!'

I said the words which she dictated to me, my hand upon the Bible. Then she bade me hold forth my hand and do as I was told, repeating after her the words she should utter. I held out my hand, and she hers. Then with the other hand she brought forward the Bible and hung it upon her forefinger and mine in such a position that the ring of the key pointed from her to me. She paused for a moment with set face. Then she spoke:—

'Will Nancy be able to steal away George Penhalleck from me? Will they be married?

If so, let this Bible turn and fall. . . . *Set me as a seal upon thine heart: as a seal upon thine arm. For love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave!*'

These words, which she chanted in monotone, I had said after her, struggling with my fear. Now she seemed overmastered by her passion, and for a space swallowed and gulped at a lump that rose in her throat. And I waited until she should begin again.

'*Love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave!*' Once more the passion mastered her for a moment, and as the words died upon her lips the key moved upon our fingers, and the Bible twisted and fell to the ground. For a space the woman was dumb. Then she turned upon me furiously.

'Go!' she cried. 'Why do you stop gaping? But still, it shall not be!'

II

It would appear that the interview between George Penhalleck and Nancy had come about by accident, though it is very certain that, in any case, some such meeting must soon have

come to pass, seeing how matters were between them. Penhalleck had declared his love for her, and in the first moments which followed she had let him see all too clearly that her love for him was just as strong. Then, when he spoke of his intention to tell the whole story to Jennett and throw himself upon her mercy, Nancy had broken down and burst into tears; partly, it may be, through remorse, but partly, also, through fear of the impending crisis. She had begged him to forget what had happened between them; had declared that she would go back to Trenear, and never again return home until Jennett and he were safely married. But Penhalleck had insisted that the course he had proposed to take was the only one open to them, and at length the girl realised that it would be impossible to dissuade him from its adoption.

And so, as Jennett came from the practice of her divination, she met her old lover, who frankly told her it was impossible he should marry her.

'God knows I 'm sorry,' he said. 'I shouldn' be a man if I was not filled with sorrow. But 'tis no good. The love I had for 'ee is dead; 'tis Nancy I was made for. Can 'ee forgive us,

Jennett? A better man 'll make a better husband for 'ee than ever I could have done.'

Jennett heard him to the end with an heroic composure. When he had finished his clumsy speech she broke out upon him passionately.

'Forgive!' she cried. 'Is it a thing to forgive? Did I ask that you would come about me with your talk of love? Did I ask that you would grovel at my feet as you did that day in the spring? Body and soul of you is mine by your own free gift that I was slow to take, and though you marry your pretty doll, you will be a liar and she a thief, and you will both remember it!'

She passed onward. Reaching the farm she found out her sister.

'Had Jacob a sister?' she cried, surveying the girl scornfully. 'To think you should be such a thief, with your soft voice and your pink cheeks! May you be happy with him!'

She passed on to her bedroom; and through the night Nancy, miserable enough herself, heard her moving up and down without ceasing.

But in the morning there was no sign of the trouble she had gone through. Nancy was pale-faced, and most unhappy; her big

blue eyes had dark shadows underneath. But Jennett went as usual about her household tasks. Only she spoke hardly a dozen words in the day, and her eyes were never permitted to rest upon her sister. Towards evening Nancy stole out to have an interview with her sweetheart; and when she came back it was with an air which would have been natural only had her absence been criminal. And so things went for many miserable days. Jennett was still self-possessed and impassive; only, the mere presence of her sister seemed to affect her with a sense of physical repulsion. George Penhalleck no longer came to the farmhouse as he had been wont to do; and Nancy, who suffered abjectly during the long days, went out at night to meet him as it were by stealth. Her father was inclined to favour the present arrangement; but the affair did not seem to him of great importance. He thought that matters would settle down in the course of a day or two, and it was the abiding presence of Jennett's jealous passion that made the farm a very house of bondage to Nancy.

And gradually her wretchedness increased. It was not only that she was mentally un-

happy; it was as though some hostile element in the air she breathed acted as poison to her. Her nights were sleepless, or filled with hideous dreams; she was languid and irritable all the day, and little things seemed great; so that, when she got away from the house of her subjection to meet her lover, she constantly spoke or acted to him with childlike petulance, wasting the only tolerable hours of the day. Then she would come home, and lie awake the long night through, crying like a child at her own folly. She knew that Jennett would not of her own free will touch, or see, or approach her; and yet it seemed to her that she was being spied upon with a brooding and triumphant malice. She remembered her sister's ironical 'May you be happy!' and knew she could not pretend that she was otherwise than miserable. And yet she could have uttered a very pathetic protest against the unkindness of the Fates. She loved Penhalleck very truly; it seemed a great injustice that she should suffer because he returned that love.

There was a strange fact told of the family which dwelt in the farmhouse. It was said that whenever death drew near to any one of

them, the watchers by the bedside were always warned. Something would abide over the house, so that those who watched were bowed forward as if under the oppression of a material weight. An awful heavy silence would surround them, and they sat in their places, unable to move or speak, until the soul of the sick person had got release. And in these days the story came back to Nancy: it seemed to her that death was already in the house. She grew daily more and more miserable. Her cheeks became thinner and thinner, and the dark circles round her eyes deepened. There were times when it seemed to her that the air of the house was hot and sterile; she would go out into the wide fields where the cool winds came fresh from the sea, and almost immediately, overtaken with deadly weakness, would creep back to the house. Her lover was not long in perceiving the change which had come over her; indeed, no small number of her unreasonable outbreaks of ill-temper had followed upon his suggestions that she should seek the advice of some one skilled in medicine.

But what he could not effect was presently accomplished by a few words from the wife of

a labourer on the farm. Nancy had gone forth one day, and chanced to pass the miserable mud cottage in which the woman lived. She heard a voice calling her name, and turning saw the woman standing in the doorway.

'What is it?' she said brokenly.

'Beggin' your pardon, Miss Nancy,' said the woman, 'but you're gone to look fine and poorly these last few weeks. They tell me you've got a sweetheart, but I can't fancy 'tis true to see that white face o' yours.'

Nancy sighed impatiently. 'Yes,' she said, 'I'm poorly enough. Is that all you have to tell me?'

The woman paused and looked at her curiously. 'Why, no,' she said. 'Come inside and take a chair, and I'll tell 'ee what I got to say.'

Nancy entered the cottage, and the woman continued. 'Do 'ee know Mary Cundy, that do live on the moor near to the Trenear road?'

The girl shivered. 'A horrible old woman!' she said. 'She has the evil eye.'

The woman interrupted. 'All the more reason to speak soft of her,' she said. 'Them

that can make people ill without a disease can cure them that's sick in the same way.'

The girl started. 'You mean——'

'I mean,' said the woman, bending nearer, and speaking with particular emphasis, 'I mean that to my thinkin' you're very sick indeed, with a sickness no doctor can cure. And if there's a cure to be had, Mary Cundy'll be bound to know it.'

Nancy did not answer. After a moment's silence she rose and went upon her way. But the suggestion of this labourer's wife remained with her and made its impression.

That evening she went out to meet her lover again, and he was not a little surprised at the changed manner in which she replied to his reiterated expressions of anxiety.

'Iss,' she said. 'I haven' been well this last few weeks; I haven' been able to sleep like I do belong to. But I shall be all right in a day or two, or I'll go to any doctor you like to name, and take whatever stuff he gives me.'

Then she turned the conversation into other channels, and to his amazement put on something of the light and careless gaiety which had fascinated him in his earliest intercourse

with her. When at last they parted her gaiety altogether deserted her; but the languor and depression of the last few weeks were gone. She had recognised, and strengthened herself to resist, the hostile influence which had so nearly overcome her.

III

The night brought sleep, and worked in her a miracle of restoration. And through the day she moved about the house with a quiet courage altogether unlike her late listlessness; so that Jennett watched her with an uneasy surprise. Towards night the elder sister disappeared for a space, and Nancy ran upstairs hurriedly and donned a big cloak. She wrapped herself in it and set forth from the farmhouse, making across the fields in the direction of the Trenear road. It was a beautiful June evening; the sun had set, but the clear sky was still softly luminous, and the young moon grew brighter every moment. Daisies swayed and danced in the long reddish grass; the green corn rustled faintly; a murmur of the sea came out of the distance if ever the wind was still for a moment.

Nancy was going to interview the woman of the evil eye, who dwelt in a ruinous hovel where the high-road skirts the great moorland. She was assured that no natural causes had sapped her strength in the weeks which were past; she was now resolved to fight her hidden enemy with the only potent weapon, opposing influence to influence.

She had not gone far before a clump of broken and distorted pine-trees, standing clear-etched against the sky, marked her destination; for the moor slopes upward for the space of three or four hundred yards on the north of the road, and at its highest point stands the plantation. The cottage of the white witch lay beyond this, on its cold northern side.

The darkness grew as she went on, and when she had stepped out upon the moorland the pine wood was a black mass before her. Nevertheless she advanced through the wood towards the cottage. And suddenly, as she reached its outskirts, her heart stood still with sudden fright. For a man stepped out of the darkness and laid a hand upon her arm. 'Hush!' he said, 'hush!'

For a moment terror kept her silent. Then

she recognised him. 'George!' she said, in a hoarse whisper.

Evidently he also had not recognised to whom he spoke. 'You!' he said. 'Jennett's in there talking with Mary Cundy. I happened to be walking across the moor and saw her come this way. And I followed, for I knew then why you were so sick and ill. Go forth as quiet as you can, and put your ear to a chink of the wall.'

Trembling with fear and excitement Nancy crept forward and listened. Jennett was speaking—angrily.

'. . . . fooling me! I thought at first that all was going well. She was weak, and pale, and wretched, and couldn' try to pretend no other. But last night there was a change in her; she had thrown off the tiredness that was dragging her down to the grave. And to-day the change is greater: she is pale still, and her cheeks are thin; but, for all that, her strength is come back to her. She began singing once, and until to-day she has forgotten all her songs since she wronged me. Tell me, Mary Cundy, art foolin' me? 'Tis a game that'll hardly pay, if you'll believe me.'

Nancy listened, trembling, to the reply of the old woman.

'Fooling 'ee?' she said indignantly, 'and all because the girl's in better spirits one day than another? Aren't there ups and downs in every illness? I suppose she took the—medicine?'

Jennett laughed hatefully. 'Never mother was more careful with a child like to die. I've seen her take it with my own eyes. But to-day I have almost tired of these slow measures. She poisons the air for me, and spoils the sunshine. Can you not make haste?'

'Haste would spoil the sunshine, in very truth, and maybe stop the need of air for both of us,' replied the crone. 'Can you not have patience, when you know that she will die? What does it matter that she has some few days yet to live? You will see the grass green on her grave.'

Penhalleck had crept forward and put his arm about Nancy.

'She shall hang first!' he muttered. 'She shall hang!' He drew his sweetheart closer to him, as Jennett spoke again.

'Ay,' she said. 'We must wait, I suppose.

But, oh! the days are hateful to me while she lives. Give me the powder.'

George Penhalleck moved softly along the wall of the house until he stood outside the window. There was a light within, and this revealed to him the face of his old sweetheart as she waited for the poison. He saw her hide it in her breast and hand some money to the witch. Then he crept back to Nancy's side.

'Go forth and knock at the door,' he said. 'I shall be close to you.'

The girl shrunk from him, fearing to face the woman who had striven to murder her. But he persisted. She yielded and stepped forward, raising her hand to knock. But at that instant the door was opened, and the sisters were face to face. Jennett started backwards, and her hand rose swiftly towards her breast. But in a moment she had recovered her self-command.

'What!' she cried scornfully, 'fallen so low already that you must go seeking charms to keep what you stole in so short a time? Lord, I could find it in my heart to pity you! Mother, here's another come to get advice; and remember the thief's helper should get handsome payment!'

Nancy stood silent; the old woman watched the scene from a corner of the room. But at the end of Jennett's outbreak Penhalleck stepped forward out of his concealment. And before he had time to speak a word Jennett had perceived the meaning of the scene.

'So,' she said, 'you have spied upon me! Well, you have heard pretty tidings!'

Penhalleck trembled. 'You shall hang!' he said. 'You shall hang, if my own hands put the rope about your neck.'

And Jennett laughed. She stepped quickly to the table, on which there stood a cup of water. Before she could be stopped she had emptied a white powder into it out of a packet she took from her breast. She drained the cup. Then she turned and faced her old lover again.

'Man,' she said, 'you would think justice done if I were hanged in the sight of all the world. And I did long to kill your pretty doll; I hated the world while she was in it. But remember, George Penhalleck, that when you had found all out I could still scorn you, and your scorn of me. I go a long journey to-night, but this I know—that the place I go to holds none but is your better.'

She paused. 'Good-bye, old woman,' she said. Then she stepped past the lovers into the darkness which brooded over the moorland: going forth to die, like some wild animal, under the cloak of the vast night.

A PAGAN DREAM

I CLIMBED the hillside under the hot sun by the pathway through the heather. Reaching the summit, I mounted upon the ancient granite altar. Below me were the ugly villages and towns; wide regions of the country were desolated by the work of miners; beyond these was the great sea. I stretched myself upon the altar, where human victims had once lain, and dreamed of the old time.

Gradually I lost consciousness of the blue sky and the larks' singing, though perhaps not altogether of that distant, satisfying gleam of the sea. A vision of this hillside lying beneath a melancholy evening sky invaded my senses, and I knew that I beheld things which had happened here in the old days, whose deeds are no longer kept in memory.

There was a gathering of men and women about the ancient granite pile; they were dark-

haired, and of less than the common stature: clad in garments of skins and undyed wool. They spoke but little, and that in a language incomprehensible to me; but their eyes gleamed with an evident excitement. Whatever might be the event they awaited, it was plain that some among them were very loth to witness it.

Presently an old man appeared among them, at whose presence all grew silent, though such of them as had seemed angry before eyed him askance, with manifest ill-will. His aspect was terrible indeed. He wore a tunic of white wool, and over it a cloak made out of the skins of wolves; his feet were sandalled. His long iron-grey hair fell upon his shoulders, but the forehead was shaven, and the front ridge of the hair jagged into teeth, as it were. I thought immediately of the Druids and of the 'magical rule' which was seen upon their heads; but I knew he was none of these, for about his neck was a cord, from which there hung a cross of bone.

The man moved about among the people, and some of them spoke to him willingly enough; but there were others who seemed loth to answer, and still eyed him sombrely. It

was evident they all were waiting until certain others should come.

And soon they turned, when one cried aloud, and pointed down the pathway which climbed through the tall heather and the stunted oaks. A young man was slowly mounting, bending to talk with a girl who advanced at his side. It seemed he was encouraging her to persist in some undertaking from which she shrank with overmastering fear. As they drew near (the excitement of those who stood by the altar now increasing) I saw that she was clad less rudely than the others, and possessed a certain nobility of mien and carriage. About her neck there was a torque of yellow gold, and there were heavy golden bracelets upon her bare arms.

The young man was entreating her to have courage, and she came forth with him lingeringly and most unwillingly until they had reached the summit. It appeared that some of the people held her in great reverence, and these were they who had looked angrily at the priest. The others seemed to welcome and encourage her, but from these she shrank with something of loathing, and not a little disdain.

Of the priest alone did she appear to stand in dread.

Silence fell on the people. The old man stepped upon a smaller table of granite which stood near the great altar-pile, and began to speak in a strange tongue. Sometimes he seemed as one possessed, accusing the people of unpardonable sin, and warning them of the judgment they should inherit; sometimes again he essayed to speak comfortably to them, though his worn face and the jagged horror of his hair made him appear more fitly the messenger of wrath and of damnation than of the great peace of God.

And the people who listened cared less for what he told them of the mercy of God than for what he spoke when, raving, he manifestly talked to them of the horrors of the judgment. A fierce excitement grew among them; even while he still spoke they began to cry out, their faces working with passion. But still there were some who seemed to participate unwillingly.

At last the old man was silent. He brought forth a cake which had been baked among the embers, and broke it into fragments. Then he poured wine into a golden cup.

The people fell back, forming a circle in which the young man and the girl stood face to face with the priest. A dreadful fear was visible in her eyes; it was as though she saw death incarnate in horrid form before her.

The priest came forward and addressed her in wheedling tones of entreaty and encouragement; but she turned from him shuddering, and hid her face upon the shoulder of her lover. Then he took up the task of persuasion. For some time the girl made as if she did not hear him, hiding her face. Finally, as his entreaty grew more urgent, she once more faced the priest, her face still eloquent of the agony and conflict existing within her. A look of triumph came into the eyes of the grey priest.

The people drew closer, pressing round the two who stood within the circle. At a word from the priest the youth knelt, and the girl, hesitating for a moment, did likewise. Then he took the broken bread and, muttering unintelligibly, gave a portion of it to each.

The youth ate the portion which had been given to him, but the girl still held back. Finally, she took the morsel, glanced desperately into the face of her lover, and strove to swallow

it. But the holy bread seemed like to choke her; a great fear grew in her wild eyes. Then the priest took the golden cup and gave it into her hands that she might drink. She raised it to her mouth and drank a little of the wine, but it had no sooner passed her lips than she choked again. For a moment she strove to master herself; then, with a cry of utter fear, she sprang to her feet, letting the golden cup fall, so that the wine of the sacrament was spilled upon the turf.

Yet again she struggled for a moment against the agony which tore her. Then, yielding suddenly as a dam broken by weight of water, she fell prone upon the ground, her body tortured with the pangs of dissolution, her eyes eloquent of horrid fear. For a space she writhed there; then, while the others still watched in helpless panic, she lay still.

And the lover cried aloud and knelt over her, seeing that she was dead; but the priest stood and faced the crowd.

For a murmur arose among them. A stone flew through the air, and the jagged ridge upon the old man's forehead was bloody. For a while there was much tumult, the people being

divided among themselves. But in the end of my dream I beheld them turn upon the grey priest and stone him until he lay dead beside the girl.

And so I awoke.

Below me were the ugly little towns, but now my eyes passed beyond them to dwell on the shining sea. Even so had the pagan girl beheld it, a leaden line, in the moment of her death. Long ago her history passed out of memory, nor is it any longer told among the people how the priest died on the hillside. But the altar of the old gods stands to this day upon the Carn Dhu, nor are they cheated of their proper worship.

For they were the gods of our fathers, and live again in us; so that, if a man strive to cast them out of his heart, which they inhabit, he must surely die himself, even as the girl died by this old altar, centuries ago.

THE LAST PAGAN

It was long since the grey priests, voyaging from overseas, had landed in the country. The story of their coming had already become an old, dark tale, and men shuddered for the wickedness of dimly-realised forefathers, who had slain many of the strangers by the altars of the gods they strove to dispossess. Now those gods were dethroned, and their names almost passed out of memory. The altars were cold. The priests, already regarding themselves as members of an order long established in the land, had seized upon the holy places and proclaimed themselves the interpreters of their mysteries: so that if water healed, or a sick child recovered strength when it had been passed at sunrise through the holed stone, the people no longer gave thanks to the old gods, who had been wont to confer their mercies by these means throughout all

the centuries which had been before the coming of the priests from overseas.

Even the senseless dead might no longer get the purification of flame. There was need that their miserable bodies should be kept whole, and so they were laid in graves digged in the earth, where the unclean worm might prey on them; and the grey priests muttered prayers above, and sprinkled water themselves had sanctified by virtue of their words. For they had waxed strong in the land, taking toll of all who visited the holy places which had been holy long before their coming; and the people dared not speak of the faith which their fathers had held.

But there was one man whom the priests had ever hated; for he had made a mock of their teaching, saying he would still worship the gods who revealed themselves in moon and sun, in the green of leaves and grass, and in the abiding silences of hills and moorland. All his life long they had followed him with heavy persecution, bidding all men shun him, and making it a virtue to injure him.

For, whilst he was young, he had conformed to the teaching of one who was before them

in the land; and, because it was told him that the old gods would assuredly betray their worshippers to eternal flames, he had persuaded the girl whom he loved to do likewise. But the holy bread had choked her, the wine of the sacrament been as poison: so that she died before the grey priest on the Carn Dhu. And the people had stoned the priest until he died upon the hillside; and this man had cast off the new faith, fearing the gods who had shown the might of their anger in the death of the girl whom he loved.

And so, when the priests got power, this man was taken as the incarnation of the old things against which they had fought and still were fighting: for the old things were deep in the hearts even of those who denied them altogether. Yet he was also a common man, and open to the full effect of their malice.

Had they held full sway he must have perished very quickly; but, though he was old beyond all others in that country, there were still some in whose hearts the voices of the banished gods spoke. Because the power of the priests was great, and to disobey them dangerous, they feigned to do in all things

as they commanded. But, for some reason less plain to themselves, they also feared the gods they had put away; and the outcast, being able to tell them what was their will, had a power among them which was all the greater because they usually carried themselves as if they also hated and scorned him.

The old man dwelt alone in a cave upon the summit of a great stony hill above the sea; and upon a certain day (a festival of the forgotten gods) the people to whom he had been a teacher gathered here as soon as darkness had fallen over the land and they could come unseen.

They found the old man waiting, seated upon a block of stone at the mouth of the cave, his face like the face of the dead. And when he had seen them he spoke.

'My children,' he said, 'the weight of many years is upon me, and I sink swiftly towards death. More things than ye know of will die with me.'

The people wailed, and cried aloud in their distress, saying, 'Who shall teach us the things men need to know, if thou be taken from us? What can the grey priests tell us?'

The old man sighed. 'The gods will return,' he said. 'The priests will yet be driven into the sea whence they came, though it may be the youngest among you will not see the day. But, since I am to die, let me die utterly, and not feed the worms. I shall pass before the sunrise. Stay with me until then, and, when the spirit is gone out of me, lay a stone against the mouth of the cave and go hence, saying nothing to the priests. But at night do ye come back; and let my body be burned and the ashes of it cast into the sea. It is not proper I should be laid in earth. Do ye promise?'

And the people promised.

Then the old man stretched himself upon a couch of heather within the cave, and before the sun was risen he died, even as he had foretold. The people watched in silence, and when the spirit was gone out of him they laid a great stone against the mouth of the cave and went into their own homes.

Throughout the day they were as the folk around them, but at night they stole forth to the hill above the sea, bearing logs and cloven wood. They cut the tall heather where

it grew, and piled the logs upon it, working in silence and awe, because of the old man who lay dead in the cave hard by. And when the pyre was raised they moved away the stone which had closed the mouth of the cave and bore him thither. Then one of them brought dried leaves and laid them among the heather under the logs, and with a flint struck a spark which kindled them. At first there was only smoke. Then a flame began to spread among the heather, and the people stood back.

The flames grew, and the burning heather hissed and crackled. As the tawny golden smoke parted before the wind they saw the white face of the old man lying as in sleep on a cushion of brown fern. And when the wood caught fire the spirit of song came upon them, and they danced about the pyre, chanting a hymn which he had taught them.

They sang of the forgotten gods who made the corn to grow and the earth to be clothed in loveliness: the gods who made the hills for their habitation, revealed themselves in the shining of moon and sun and stars, and gave to men the fire which purifies. And while they

sang the hissing flames leapt higher and higher, and the old man sank into them as a sodden log sinks in water. Now some fetched more heather, and tore thick branches from the old trailing gorse to fling on the pile, whilst the others still continued to sing, dancing about the flames as their dead fathers had been wont to do.

But the stars had travelled long in their courses, and the sky turned grey. Gradually the people ceased from singing, and the fire sank lower and lower. They stood silent at last, and the chill light of the morning showed a pile of grey ashes, with glowing embers underneath. They could trace the outline of something dimly resembling the figure of a man.

A cold wind came from the sea, so that they shivered, and the light ash was blown against them.

Then a man brought forth a great earthen vessel, and into this they collected the ashes, still interspersed with glowing embers. Small flames broke out again as they stirred the pile, but lasted only a little time. Presently the task of the men was ended. The sky turned rose-red as they descended, making for a high

point of the coast. The larks had begun to sing, but the sea lay livid and grey in the shadow of the cliff.

They paused a moment, then flung the earthen vessel from them. It turned in falling, and a smoke of grey dust was scattered in the air. The charred bones fell more swiftly; and, as the sea-gulls rose, circling and screaming in the gloom which hung about the face of the cliff, the men turned from the sea and went into their own homes.

THE GREY WOLF

AT dusk the wolves moved soundlessly among the oaks on the Carn Dhu; and when the darkness followed, the night was filled with the noise of their howling. Now, the Father of all the wolves, a giant among the beasts, was hated even as he was feared. For many a child, wandering late, had died by his fangs, yet no man had been able to kill him, though the task had often been essayed by those who had the spur of fierce grief. And so a host of superstitions hung about the huge grey beast, and there were many who believed it was beyond the power of man to rid the earth of him.

But one day a girl of that country went forth from her home in the dusk, and when deep night had fallen she was still away. Dawn came, and she had not returned. And a hunter, a man who loved her, came to her home with haggard face and spoke in a voice hardly to be

understood for choking passion. As he went through the woods in the dawn he had come upon a mangled human body. Standing above it he had perceived it to be the body of a woman. Kneeling with sudden fear and looking more closely, he had seen that this was the girl he loved. And immediately he swore a great oath: for he knew well that this was the work of the grey wolf whom all men feared.

The torn and desecrated body was brought home and the funeral rites conducted. But of all this the hunter knew nothing. A passion of revenge had taken hold on him, and he went forth into the woods and moorlands, a great bronze axe in his hand, seeking for the grey wolf that he might kill him.

Day after day he sought his enemy, growing white and haggard for lack of food, and through the torture of unappeased desire. Sometimes he cried aloud in his madness, taunting the huge beast which still avoided him. He had gone forth thinking he must needs be led straightway to the lair of his enemy, and slay him in fair fight, rending his limbs asunder even as the white limbs of the dead girl had

been torn. But after many days he understood the cunning of the old grey wolf, and knew that he also must fight by subterfuge if he would attain his end.

He found a place in the hillside where the trees stood apart, and the grass grew long and rank in the shadow of grey rocks. Then he brought a kid, not yet weaned, and fettered it in the midst of the open space. He hid himself hard by, and watched; his hand still clung to the haft of the axe.

The kid soon bleated miserably, finding little sustenance in the rank grass it cropped. The man watched it, not all without pity; and ever, as the kid grew weaker and more thin, himself became more and more haggard. For the passion that filled him, being still unsatisfied, fed upon the springs of life, burning like a fire within him. Two days went by, and two nights; and often the hunter's heart leapt within him, when he heard the howl of a wolf, a sudden noise of underwood thrust apart, or the crack of a dry branch trodden upon. But it seemed as if the terror of his presence and his purpose announced itself to all the beasts of the forest. Often he knew that his enemy

was near. Yet the old wolf never came to that space in the midst of the woods.

Throughout the second night of his watching a cold rain fell and a bitter wind came in gusts from the sea. The bleating of the kid was infrequent and weak almost to extinction ; the man himself lived only in virtue of the wild desire of vengeance which inhabited him. The night aged, and the sky turned to a grey smoke of rain-cloud. And suddenly a rotten branch snapped.

The hunter gripped his axe and stood upon the alert, his heart beating in great thumping beats against the walls of its cavern. The wind came and went. Then the kid bleated pitifully, as the grey wolf stole round a corner of the rocks. And the hunter cried aloud and flung his axe at the head of his enemy. The huge beast snarled and paused, bewildered and blinded by the weight of the blow ; and the man leapt forward in an instant, himself no other than a beast of the fields.

For a long time that space among the rocks was as the pit of hell ; for the man and the wolf fought together with the weapons God gave them ; and the grey wolf was filled with terror,

but the man thought only of the dead girl, and that his enemy was beneath his hands. And so, in the end, he arose, the blood falling in heavy drops from gaping wounds in limbs and chest. But the gaunt wolf was stretched upon the coarse grass, dead.

For awhile the hunter stood beside the body, swaying to and fro with faintness. A blindness had come upon him. But when the kid bleated again he bent and released it, watching it absently as it went into the woods. And it seemed to him that he had long since come to the end of his life. He had died when the girl lay dead and that passion of revenge entered into his body ; but until it was satisfied he did not recognise what had befallen him. Now he stood haggard in the ashen dawn and knew himself to be no more a man than the ghosts which dwell in hills by the sea, or in the mounds raised where the bodies of heroes were laid long since. He looked at the grim body of the wolf and knew that his life was ended, though he had not attained to the peace of death. And he wondered what he should do with his life that was not life.

But the wind came through the woods, and

the voice of it spoke in his heart. He took the axe of bronze, and cut a staff from an oak: for he was weak with wounds and fasting, and because his aim had been accomplished. His path as he travelled was marked with blood. For he turned from his dead enemy, and walked through the lonely country, towards the cold North.

At first he hardly comprehended to what end he was moving. But gradually the voice which had called him, speaking in the wind, conveyed the knowledge he lacked. He had a vision of the great sea which should presently purge him of his life. He grew weaker and weaker as he advanced through the woods and over the rough and marshy ground; yet he suffered no pain or weariness. An exquisite calm fell on him, and all his thoughts were dreams of the great peace of death. And so he came at last to the high cliffs.

The sun had risen, but the waters were cold and grey in the shadow of the cliffs. For a moment they repelled him, and he became distantly aware of his deathly weakness. But the sea spoke soothingly, and he climbed downwards, moving like a man entranced by some

spell of magical words. He gained the lowest rocks and the waves were at his feet. He paused and closed his eyes, as if for sleep. Then he fell forward, and in a moment the sea had taken him.

THE COWARD

THERE were two who loved the maiden: one of them a chieftain, whose word was as the law over many miles of moor and forest; the other a mere hunter, born only that he might surrender all desires—even to the desire of living—at the will of men stronger or more sagacious. And the maiden hated the great chief; for the hunter was more to her than life itself.

When the tidings came that the chief had chosen her for his consort, she had but one thought: to resist the irresistible, and continue faithful to him she had chosen to love. The night before, she had gathered from the demeanour of her parents that some great matter had befallen. They treated her with a new deference; and jested obscurely. In the morning her mother told her; and throughout the day the girl sat spinning with rude implements before the low door of the hut, a passion of

revolt at her heart. She did not speak. But when the night was almost fallen she put aside her work and went forth to the trysting-place among the stunted oaks which covered the slopes of the Carn Dhu.

She sat silently upon a block of the grey moorstone, her face bowed upon her hands; and presently her lover came to meet her. She was a creature magnificently tall and strong: a daughter of the wide waste-lands and the open air, as yet unbowed by labour in the scanty clearings where the yellow wheat was tilled. But the hunter was small beyond the most of his fellows, and none too skilful in the chase. It was only when tired hunters gathered about the great fire at the day's end, and there was need of some one to sing of what others did, that he became a man of some importance. Yet the girl loved him, and took his least word for the law of her soul.

The man came forth to greet her, a light song upon his lips; but when he had looked upon her face he too was silent. And in a few words she told him of the evil thing which had come upon them, and entreated him to devise some plan whereby they might escape. A

feeling which might have grown into distrust came over her as she watched him and heard his ineffectual words. Beyond a doubt he loved her with all his strength; but he feared the great chief, and could find no counsel, but only lamentations, and passionate declarations of his love.

The girl sat silent, a shadow as of the dark night of death upon her face; the stars came out above them. She seemed to be unconscious of his caresses; and presently she arose, almost thrusting him from her. 'There is one thing left,' she said. 'What life awaits us when we have passed from the light of sun and moon we know not. It may be that in the narrow house of the grave we are dead, even as the stones above us are dead. But in the grave we shall abide together, and it were better to be dust together than to live apart. We must die.'

Once again her lover broke forth with declarations of his passion, and vain obloquies against the chief who had robbed them of their happiness. But the girl, standing with white face under a bare oak, repeated that which she had said: 'We must die together, since to live were to be parted.'

And so, at last, the man consented. 'When the sun rises over the hills yonder,' said the girl, 'I will rid myself of life. Do thou die also in the self-same moment, and come with me to discover what lies beyond. Call my name in the moment of death, and my soul shall seek thine, that we may go together.'

Then they parted. In the morning the hunter watched for the rising of the sun. The sky turned from the hue of night to morning grey, and the larks soared; then the heavens were blue, and a light fleece of cloud shone rose-red in the West. And presently the radiance of the East grew stronger; a rim of gold appeared above the dark hills, and the man knew that the hour of his death was come. He listened—and suddenly it seemed to him that a voice shrilled over the hushed land calling his name. He staggered where he stood, and raised the knife of bronze to his breast. But it had pleased the gods to make him a coward. In the moment when he should have slain himself he flung the knife away from him, and fell forward in a swoon.

Later, he recovered; but the sun was now high in the heavens, and as he came to himself he

heard a distant sound of wailing. The maiden had kept the faith which he had broken, casting herself from a high rock when the sun first rose in the East. They were conveying her body into the house of her father.

From that time forth the hunter loathed the life for whose sake he had become forsworn. He would have slain himself had he not feared to meet her, now that she knew how great a coward he was. He neither ate nor drank; the neighbourhood of his fellows was hateful to him. But presently, in the course of his wanderings, he met a little child, and asked many questions. And it was told him that the chief, who had loved the dead girl no less than himself had loved her, was resolved that she should have the burial of a chieftain's wife. Even now they were building a great house of granite in which she should lie; and, when she had been laid in it, and the earth piled above, a man was to be slain to guard and serve her in the dark world which lies on the farther side of death.

Still the lover wandered alone in solitary places, touching neither food nor drink. But presently he heard that all the people were to

be assembled, in order that the companion and slave of the dead girl—the man to be offered to the gods as the price of her felicity—might be chosen after the appointed fashion. He had gotten strength in these days of darkness. And at the time fixed he joined the crowd of his fellows, looking forward to death with a glad heart.

The Druids had already kindled a huge fire of gorse and heather, mingled with the dead branches of trees, on the summit of the Carn Dhu. Already the night had fallen. And at a given word, when the flame rose highest, the company joined hands and formed a circle about the fire. The Druids stood aloof, clad in coarse linen and grey wolf-skins; the hair shaven from their foreheads, and jagged into horrid teeth in the front ridge. And when the circle was complete, they began to chant a hymn of the old gods, while the people moved about the fire.

At first they went slowly, knowing that death hovered above them, to fall swiftly upon him who should first break hands. And the golden flames showed white faces, and eyes filled with fear. But the hymn which the Druids chanted

quickly made them drunken, as with the strong wine of the heather; and soon they ran about the flames, rushing in upon them at intervals with shouts and screamings, and themselves chanting the praises of their gods.

The chief stood watching behind the group of the Druids. In his hand was a huge axe of green jade—a sacred thing, which had travelled in the course of centuries, and through many hands, out of Asia. And if ever a man lost his footing or staggered in the circling of the company, he grasped it more firmly, and seemed about to spring forward.

But, suddenly, a great resolve which had been forming in the mind of the man who loved the dead girl moved him to action. He tore himself away from the ring, and, turning, faced the Druids and the man who watched and waited behind them.

The chief dashed forward, raising the axe of green jade. But the hunter cried aloud, filling the vast night with the sound of the dead girl's name. 'I come!' he cried, 'I come!' And in that moment the axe fell, and he sprawled upon the ground, his skull cloven to the chin. The others fled horror-stricken into the night,

leaving his body to the Druids, and to the chieftain who had slain him.

But a voice came out of the darkness, from where the sea lay, and the name it called across the moor and the woodlands was the name of him who lay dead and bloody in the red light of the fire.

THE END

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